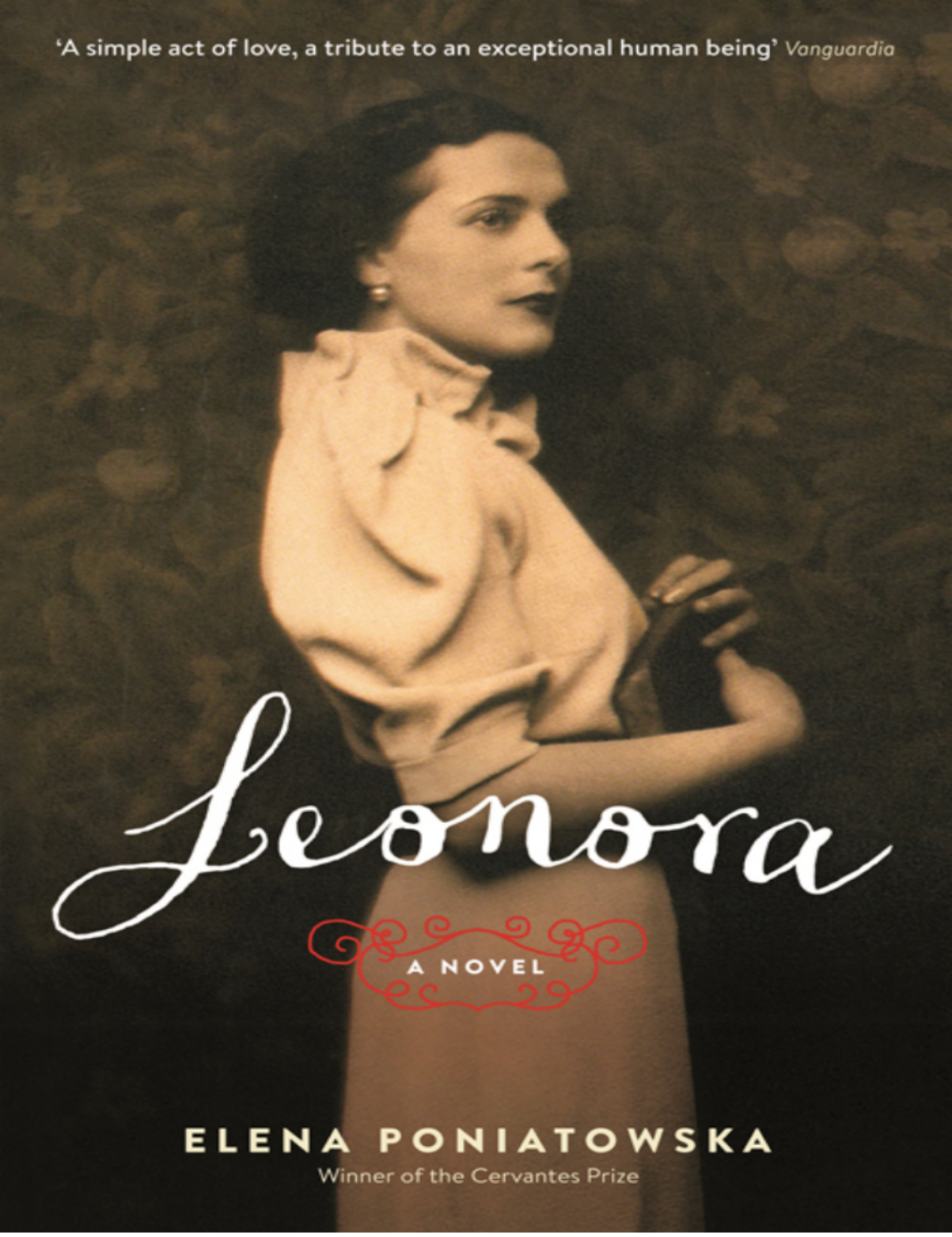
'A simple act of love, a tribute to an exceptional human being' Vanguardia
Leonora
A NOVEL
ELENA PONIATOWSKA
Winner of the Cervantes Prize

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Annotation

Born in Lancashire as the wealthy heiress to her British father's textiles empire, Leonora Carrington was destined to live the kind of life only known by the moneyed classes. But even from a young age she rebelled against the strict rules of her social class, against her parents and against the hegemony of religion and conservative thought, and broke free to artistic and personal freedom.

Today Carrington is recognised as the key female Surrealist painter, and Poniatowska's fiction charms this exceptional character back to life more truthfully than any biography could. For a time Max Ernst's lover in Paris, Carrington rubbed elbows with Salvador Dalí, Marcel Duchamp, Joan Miró, André Breton and Pablo Picasso. When Ernst fled Paris at the outbreak of the Second World War, Carrington had a breakdown and was locked away in a Spanish asylum before escaping to Mexico, where she would work on the paintings which made her name. In the hands of legendary Mexican novelist Elena Poniatowska, Carrington's life becomes a whirlwind tribute to creative struggle and artistic revolution.

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Elena Poniatowska

Leonora

About the Author

ELENA PONIATOWSKA is Mexico's greatest living novelist. She lives in Coyoacán, a quiet suburb of Mexico City close to the Casa Azul, where Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera and — until his assassination — Leon Trotsky resided. Fluent in English, French and Spanish, Poniatowska has published novels, non-fiction books and essays and been translated into over twenty languages. She is one of the founders of *La Jornada*, the feminist magazine *Fern*, publishing house Siglo XXI and Mexican national film institute Cineteca Nacional. For over fifty years she was a close friend of Leonora Carrington's, until the latter's death in 2011.

AMANDA HOPKINSON has translated books from French, Portuguese and Spanish, mostly from Latin America. She also writes books on Latin American culture, particularly photography. A former director of the British Centre for Literary Translation, she is currently visiting professor in literary translation at City University, London.

Praise for *Leonora*

'One of the most powerful voices in modern Hispanic writing' Cervantes Prize citation

'Masterful … Poniatowska paints a picture of a troubled woman who personifies the dreams and nightmares of the twentieth century' Biblioteca Breve Prize citation

'A simple act of love, a tribute to an exceptional human being' *Vanguardia*

Leonora

To my grandson Thomas

1. CROOKHEY HALL

THE DINING-ROOM TABLECLOTH is laid with dishes and around it are gathered the four children: Patrick, the eldest, is breakfasting on porridge, as are Gerard and Arthur; Leonora dislikes the stuff but the nanny, Mary Kavanaugh, says that when she reaches the middle of her bowl of oats she'll find Lake Windermere, the biggest and most beautiful lake in all England. So the girl, spoon in hand, eats the porridge from the outside edge inwards, beginning to hear the sound of water and see how tiny waves ruffle its surface as she nears Windermere.

Of the boys' three pairs of watching eyes, Gerard's are her favourite because they smile.

The dining room is dark and gloomy, just like the rest of Crookhey Hall. Leonora has known soot since she was a child. Perhaps Planet Earth is one immense chimney. The smoke surging from the Lancashire textile mills accompanies her night and day. Leonora's father is the king of all this blackness, and he, the brilliant businessman, is the blackest of all of them. Even the men she sees out on the street are dark with soot. Her grandfather invented the machine that manufactures a blend of wool and cotton trademarked Viyella, and Carrington Cottons stands out proudly in a county where the air is always tinged with the factory ash. When her father, Harold Wilde Carrington, sells the company to Courtaulds, he becomes the main shareholder in Imperial Chemical Industries.

Crossing Crookhey Hall from one wing to the other requires a great many steps. The Gothic mansion accommodates the Carringtons — father, Harold; mother, Maurie; the brother who follows Leonora around and is her playmate, Gerard; unlike Patrick, who is too grown up, or Arthur, who's too young. Two Scottish Terrier puppies, Rab and Toby, keep her company. Leonora kneels in front of Rab to look him in the eye and rub noses.

'Are you walking on all fours?' her mother asks her.

Leonora blows on Rab's face and he nips her.

'What did you do that for?' her mother asks in fear. 'He could give you a nasty scar.'

If adults ask children why they do this or that it is because they lack the ability to enter that mysterious space shared by children and animals.

'Are you telling me I'm not an animal?' an astonished Leonora demands to know.

'Yes, you are a human animal.'

'But I know I am a horse, Mummy, inside I am a horse.'

‘If that were true, your drive and strength would make you a filly, always launching yourself over every obstacle. Yet what I see before me is a girl all dressed in white with a medallion around her neck.’

‘You’re wrong, Mummy, I am a horse dressed as a girl.’

Tartar is the wooden rocking horse on which, since earliest childhood, she has gone riding several times a day. ‘Gee-up, Tartar, gallop!’ Her dark eyes flash, her face points forward, her hair becomes a mane, and the reins swing wildly about the animal’s extended neck.

‘Get down at once, Prim,’ Nanny demands. ‘You’ve been on him for ages. If you don’t dismount now, your father will come and put the bit between *your* teeth.’

Harold Carrington’s children are afraid of him. They live their lives apart, their domain being the nursery, and they are presented to their parents once a day. Occasionally, their parents require their presence for tea in either the living room or the library. They are only permitted to speak when spoken to. ‘Milk or lemon?’ enquires their mother, her right hand holding the silver Sheffield teapot in the air. She has the odd habit of exclaiming: ‘Someone has just spilt something on their clothes … Someone is slurping their tea … I can see black ink lodged under the fingernails of someone here … Someone is pointing with their finger … Someone else is tinkling their spoon in their teacup … Someone here is not sitting up straight in their chair …’ and the four children straighten up as one. Leonora watches the servants pass like draughts of air, barely if at all addressing her. The only ones who speak directly to her are her French governess, Mlle. Varenne, the nanny, and her brothers’ tutor, also responsible for giving her catechism lessons.

Adults keep asking Leonora: ‘How are your studies coming along? Could you read aloud to me?’ Good manners belong on the walls with the heavy mirrors, with the footstools, the cups of boiling tea to be raised just so to avoid burning one’s lips, the paintings of ancestors unable to share even a wink of complicity. Everything here is breakable, and it is essential to remain alert as to where you plant your feet.

‘Leonora, would you kindly inform me as to your progress in class?’ Harold Carrington regards her with sympathy. He relishes her intelligence. Leonora questions everything adults tell her, and this surprises him. His eyes follow her down the corridors of Crookhey Hall and find her charming. He will expend every effort and any amount of money on her.

Lessons unravel as interminably as the decades of a rosary. Twice weekly, fat little Mr. Richardson puts Leonora tortuously through her piano lesson. The girl’s long fingers span over an octave, and give the piano master every reason to assure Maurie that her daughter could

make a good pianist. Each time Richardson inclines his head over the keyboard, his minuscule spectacles slide off, and Leonora conceals them so he has to beg her to give them back. Next comes fencing, then ballet, each bearing a strange similarity to the other: in both, you have to jump back and forth and land on target. She would prefer to be running wild in the garden with her brothers than taking classes in sewing and embroidery, and she pricks her fingertips in annoyance at being forbidden to go out.

The entire right wing of the house belongs to the children, along with the nanny and tutor that Harold and Maurie have assigned them. Mlle. Varenne eats at table with the parents, while the Irish nanny spends all day and night with the children, which is why they love her. One day, Mlle. Varenne was to be packed off back to France, *Marseillaise* and all. They had known for sure one day she'd be off, but Mary Kavanaugh, never. Despite being small and skinny, her lap and her shoulder were always comforting to lean on. She magnetised them with her tales of the miniature people she called the *sidhes.*

'Why can't I see them, Nanny?'

'Because they live underground.'

'Are they dwarves?'

'They're spirits which take on the form of bodies to emerge above ground.'

'So why do they live buried like that?'

'Because the Gaels arrived from Spain under the leadership of Mil Espaine and conquered the land. That was why the *sidhes* descended down into the centre of the Earth to devote themselves to magic.'

'Even if the *sidhes* were minutely small I could still see them. I see everything, Nanny.'

'No one has ever succeeded in seeing the smallest beings, Leonora, not even the scientists with their microsopes:

Big fleas have little fleas
upon their backs, to bite them.
Little fleas have lesser fleas
and so on ad infinitum.'

Sidhes jump on to the table when Leonora does her homework, they share her bath when she gets into the tin tub, her bed when she goes to sleep. Leonora speaks to them in a low voice: 'We're going to go down into the garden, come with me.' 'Mlle. Varenne is a pest, help me to make her vanish.' 'She's worn us out with her past participles and her subjunctives.' The French are like that.

'Elle nous casse les pieds,' says Leonora. 'She's breaking our feet,' she translates for her mother. 'Que tu voulusses, que nous fîmes, que vous fîtes' are verb tenses that not even the French use any more. Not even Louis XIV himself knew how to conjugate them.

The *sidhes* are even better friends than Gerard: both children have devoured Jonathan Swift, but now Gerard no longer wants to play at Lilliputians, nor solicit an audience with the Emperor Blefescu. These tiny people emerging from the ground are her advisers now, supplanting Gerard, who is no longer interested in Lewis Carroll's Alice, or in Beatrix Potter carrying her pet rabbit Peter under her arm. These are girly things. The *sidhes* are wiser than anyone else in the world, wiser even than the biggest fish in the pond, and that's saying a lot because that fish knows it all. The girl pauses on the embankment and the fish tells her all will be well and she feels lit up by the silver reflections along his back. Of course, this was with Nanny's assistance.

'May I ask you a question that no one has ever been able to answer me?'

'Go ahead and ask.'

'When will my father die?'

'You're right, I can't answer that one.'

'Nanny, why do we have to sleep at night?'

'Because it's too dark for us to do anything else.'

'Owls can, and so can bats. I've always wanted to go to sleep hanging by my heels like a bat.'

Nanny agrees: 'Yes, it's an excellent position, since it circulates the blood to the head.'

During the night Leonora wakes her up:

'I can see a boy with no clothes on sitting on a branch of the ash tree, calling to me.'

Nanny gets up and leans out of the window:

'There's nobody here.'

'I have to go to him, he'll freeze under that white sun.'

'The ash is the largest and most beautiful tree on the planet, its roots reach to the sea, its branches support the sky and, like the oak and the hawthorn, it is inhabited by fairies who wouldn't admit a boy without its permission,' says Nanny, sitting herself on the edge of the bed until the girl returns to sleep.

The same thing happens when they go for walks around Crookhey Hall:

'I saw a boy who held his little hand out to me, a little tiny hand, and I went to give him mine when he cried out and faded away.'

'I can't see anything, Prim.'

'Don't call me Prim.'

'It's just that you're all stiff and proper, look how you extend your neck.'

'I detest it when you call me Prim. Look, here he comes again. He's just hidden himself behind that tree.'

Nanny searches and smiles: 'It seems as if you attract the *sidhes*.'

‘Yes, I wish they could play with me my whole life long.’

‘If you keep reading, Prim, you’ll never be alone. The *sidhes* will accompany you.’

The young girl draws them on the nursery wall and her mother doesn’t punish her because she too is used to painting the boxes they sell at her charity fetes. Maurie draws flowers she then colours in, while Leonora paints horses and adds one pony after another on the surface of the whitewashed walls. Maurie admires her daughter’s skill: ‘You did that really well.’

If Nanny asks her which is the toy she loves best, Leonora replies:

‘Tartar is my favourite. He loathes my father.’

Whenever she is reprimanded she mounts her horse. If Gerard doesn’t want to come out into the garden with her, she rides Tartar until someone else comes into the nursery. If they refuse her dessert at mealtimes, Tartar’s rocking is more than adequate recompense for even the best chocolate cake the world has to offer.

The odour of stew draws her in, quite possibly because it is forbidden to enter the kitchens. Deep within are bubbling the mysteries of steak and kidney pies, roast beef and haddock. The old yellowed cook, propped at the side of the stove, waits for the stew pot to come to the boil. Her daughter, who works there as a maid, tells her that if she feels ill, for God’s sake she should go and lie down; she can do her job perfectly well.

‘You complain all day long, Mum.’

‘You dolt!’ shouts the cook. ‘Here I am fainting with pain and you’ve no sympathy at all!’

‘Well go and hang yourself then! There are plenty of trees outside and rope’s not dear.’

‘I should have drowned you at birth,’ responds the old woman, quivering with rage.

How can people treat one another like this? Leonora enters a different world to that of the nursery, different again to that of the stables, a world only she knows how to reach, where no-one can stop her from riding bareback or cuddling the colt, who pricks up his ears and snorts in greeting. A smell of lamb pervades the kitchen. The soup is boiling up the odours of stable, hayloft, manure, adventure, of a mane blowing in the wind that has to be grasped so tightly not to fall off and of discovery: along with the knives, the kitchen drawers hold scents that must have come all the way from Mesopotamia.

2. AMAZON GIRL

IN THE NURSERY AT HOME Leonora relives the stories told her by Mary Kavanaugh, and in Westmeath by her maternal grandmother, Mary Monica Moorhead.

'Ireland is the emerald green square in the great eiderdown that covers the Earth,' says Nanny.

'And who tucks in the Earth to go to sleep at night?'

'The sun. The sun gives cover to the poor. In Ireland, so does the mist.'

Every day the Carringtons walk the Westmeath roads and out of the mist come shades that assume the form of birds and lambs, occasionally of a fox, and frequently of horses like those Leonora so loves, or of shepherds calling up their flocks. The four children go out for walks even when it rains. 'The waters of baptism,' Nanny tells them and closes her umbrella, for if water is good for lettuces and greens, it can turn children into fruit. Grass lies on the earth like a sheet, and Leonora enjoys watching it sway in the wind, softly inclining its cheek on to the pillow. How sweet and obedient is the land! Trees, too, bend in the wind, and their branches reach for the hills. They return home in time for tea, cheeks ruddy and shiny, hair spangled with tiny raindrops, and Leonora bears within her all the energy of every horse in the land.

'You really are like a mare,' says her grandmother. She even asks if she has hooves instead of shoes, since her footsteps are so loud. 'How many fillies in each leg?' The most glorious outing is that out to the Belvedere, with its park and gardens, which descend like a royal carpet leading to the lake. Grandmother is first to raise her head.

'What tale will you tell us tonight?'

Love stories are her passion: the one about the three golden apples whose celestial music carries on the wind, or the tale of Caer, the young woman spied transforming into a swan by Aengus Mac Og on the shore of the lake

She also relates how Noah forbade the hyena from entering the Ark because it ate carrion and howled in mimicry of man's laughter. Yet after the Great Flood, the wolf and the panther cross-bred and the hyena was reborn. Leonora is obsessed by the hyena. Certain medieval accounts tell of how hyenas have two stones for eyes, and if whoever kills one removes the stones and places them under his tongue, he will be able to tell the future.

'You are a Celt, and so as stubborn a hothead as I am. Perhaps you also have something Saxon about you, which could make you calculating as well,' her grandmother tells her.

Pat invites over two friends as wild as he, sons of the Reverend Prince, who lash Leonora to a tree, and shoot arrows at her as if she were Saint Sebastian.

Their father attends the club with other gentlemen who smoke and chat about which prospective members to accept, while consuming their one whisky of the day before dining at home; their mother both receives and makes her calls. She departs the house saying: 'Be good, I am off to a charity sale. If I get back in time, I'll come up and say goodnight to you.'

The girl enters her father's library without knocking. No-one else dares open the door to this room with its narrow windows running up to the roof, ebony furniture, and Persian carpets, which muffle the sound of footsteps.

'Everyone hates me for being a girl. While I have my lessons, my brothers are out playing.'

'You're not going out to play boys' games,' replies Harold Carrington.

'My brothers and their horrible friends say that girls can't do what boys do and it's not true because I can do everything they can. I can hit as hard as Gerard, and I can draw horses, dragons, crocodiles and bats better than Pat.'

'Who are these friends of theirs?'

'The sons of the Reverend Prince who tell the most disgusting jokes I've ever heard.'

'If you wish, you can come and play curling with me,' he responds, admiring his daughter's strength of character.

'I dislike both the flat stones and the long brooms for curling. You must listen to me. I've three brothers who do as they want because they're boys. When I grow up, I want to shave my head and daub my face with hair oil to grow a beard. Pat has a moustache and at Stonyhurst they call him 'Mickey Moustache'. Once, when I called him that, he hit me.'

'Then I shall punish him.'

'Let me finish, Papa. I am the only one who has to practise piano for hours on end, wash myself and change my clothes every day, and keep saying thank you for everything.'

'Leonora, a woman's education is very different to a man's. You require training in how to please.'

'I don't want to please! I don't want to serve tea! The only thing I do want in life is to be a horse!'

'That's impossible … you could not even be a mare. You can only be yourself.'

'Mummy says I have such a bad temper that I'll turn into a witch before I'm twenty.'

‘Your mother may be mistaken. You have character and in that you resemble me.’

‘Papa, I don’t care if I get wrinkles before I’m twenty. What I do care about is going down to the pond when I feel like it, to talk with the big fish, and climbing trees like a man.’

Harold Carrington studies her from his high-backed chair behind the desk. ‘She’s a true daughter of mine. Carrington from the top of her head to the tips of her toes,’ he thinks.

When coffee is served at the end of the meal, Mlle. Varenne informs him that his daughter’s energy is three times that of her three brothers, yet that she is the one Carrington who is difficult to control. So it is that Harold Carrington looks up from reading *The Times* and replies that his daughter will need to expend her excess energy horse-riding.

Black Bess, her Shetland pony, always refuses to canter. She barely even breaks into a trot, but now, when Leonora yells, ‘Gee up, Bessie!’ suddenly Black Bess launches into a gallop. That night she dreams that Black Bess wins the Grand National, despite her plumpness. Imagining her sweet-natured, overweight pony could come in ahead of Flying Fox is sheer delight, because her grandfather’s horse has never yet lost a race.

‘Go on, Papa, please give me another horse. I’m old enough now and Black Bess will never gallop like I want her to.’

Her new mare is called Winkie. Leonora learns how to make her clear jumps. One morning Winkie refuses a jump, Leonora comes off and the mare rolls over on her.

‘All right, so nothing happened to you this time, but it could still be that Winkie is not the best mount for you.’

‘But Papa, I adore Winkie.’

The groom doesn’t let Maurie know that her daughter takes the horse out of the stable at all hours and rides out on her bareback. To start with, she clung on to the mane, but not any longer.

‘We two are one,’ she tells her mother. When she’s tired of cantering, she leans back and rests her head and shoulders on the horse’s rump and stares at the sky. Her mother accompanies her, riding side-saddle. Mother and daughter are out together and at this point in time Leonora loves her mother like a colt does hers.

‘Keep your heels down,’ Maurie tells her, ‘don’t shift your seat in the saddle.’ Mother and daughter move to a canter and, without another word, Leonora spurs Winkie on and rides her into the lake. Her mother pulls up, stupefied. Leonora and mare emerge on the opposite shore with a loud sound of splashing water.

‘Why on earth did you do that? You’re soaking.’

‘Winkie enjoys swimming and I enjoy watching how she uses her

hooves to swim.'

'The wild filly is you, not her. Why do you do such crazy things?'

'It's not crazy, it's an experiment. Have you never conducted an experiment, Mummy?'

Leonora is the rebel of the four children. It's both in her nature, and because riding gives her the freedom of a bird. Winkie is the one who understands her, her confidante and her accomplice. Hardly has she started to gallop than, just as with her morning porridge, she's in at the centre. The mare has long limbs like Leonora's, her coat shines like the hair on Leonora's head, and Winkie frees her from her dread of the adults who always demand so much of her.

'I am a horse, I am a mare,' Leonora tells anyone who will listen.

Gerard understands her: 'You are a *night*mare. At night I hear your hooves on the floor and I see you gallop out through the window, but it's good it's not for real, because if you did go it would be forever.'

Leonora comes to the table late. 'Do excuse me, I was detained by a horse who wished to take me to see his treasure.'

'Horses don't speak,' states Harold Carrington.

'They speak to Leonora,' Gerard springs to her defence. 'I have seen them nuzzle her shoulder with their lips, enquiring how she is.'

'That's quite enough nonsense!' and Harold drops his fork.

In the hunting season, the foxhounds become restless in the kennels. Desperate to get out, they bark, scratch and roll their golden eyes imploringly. Later, they return all damp, their tongues hanging out, panting and leaving white trails of saliva along the floor. Their great euphoria cheers the household while the kennelman returns to lock them in again. If the horses have their groom, the hounds have their kennelman, but who will have the answers to all Leonora's questions? 'What do they eat? How do they sleep? When will the pups be born? How do you rid them of fleas?' The hounds surround her like the huntsmen surround Carrington, who offers them sherry or whisky, making them wag their tails and bark with laughter.

The smell of the stable, animal hides, soil, sweat and blood lingers for days.

Harold hunts pheasants, hundreds of wood pigeon, wild duck, quail, hares and thousands of partridge, who reappear at funeral banquets converted into patés, timbales, mousses and casseroles. The quails' lifeless eyes are testament to the power of the patriarch's chemical industry, called 'Imperial' for good reason. Harold is also an emperor: he plunges the knife into the meat, issues orders. *Bring, put, do, open, add seasoning*. Leonora is disgusted by the appearance of the hunt on her plate. One night she dreamt that she woke to find a bloodied rabbit lying dead on her stomach.

What Harold Carrington does not know is that the fox sits and silently laughs behind his chair, the wolf peers through the window and squints inside in astonishment, deer ring the table, partridges dance hand in hand; prey no longer, still less corpses. They have won the match and are laughing at the shotguns and the foxhounds panting with their lolling tongues.

'The hounds are thoroughbreds, just like the children,' the governess boasts to Mary Kavanaugh, who isn't sure she has understood her.

'I see the children talk to anyone and anything: dogs, cats, ducks, and the geese who stretch out their necks and sway as they waddle along behind them.'

'They'd do better to prioritise their Latin and Greek. All I beg of them is less imagination and more wisdom! Knowledge is synonymous with precision and these children behave no differently to opium addicts.'

'The truth of the matter is that the animals talk to these children, regardless of how much of a hurry they are in.'

'Nanny, you are responsible for this madness.'

'I have attained heights that you never shall, Mademoiselle. I travel through astral spheres.'

'I don't doubt it in the slightest.'

'The problem is that you are French and in so being are fixated on matter. *Merde! Merde! Shit! Shit!'*

Father O'Connor, one of Patrick's Jesuit teachers, comes to celebrate Sunday Mass in Crookhey Hall's private chapel, attended by a number of guests and neighbours. Although Harold is a Protestant whose only real belief is in hard work, Maurie imposes her Catholicism. In addition, the priest is an intelligent man. After Mass he is invited to dinner and proposes:

'Let's take a look at the night sky, here in the northern hemisphere you can clearly see the spiral of the nebula of Andromeda, as well as some other constellations.'

On Leonora's face falls the reflection of the brightest star of all: Orion. 'Look up there, it's Venus!' The planets are revolving over the heads of the children. In the celestial dome over the north of England the circles made by the lights of Andromeda are clearly visible:

'I've seen this spiral in my dreams, this isn't the first time I've seen it. I recognise it,' Leonora observes.

'The division that exists between reality and the imagination is actually very tenuous,' replies Father O'Connor.

'My family tells me I've been seeing visions ever since I was two years old and nobody believes they're real except Nanny and Gerard.'

'And Pat?'

‘Pat’s a bossy boots and the fact he goes to Stonyhurst is no guarantee of intelligence.’

‘There are men and women whose dreams foretell what will happen to them.’

‘I haven’t the faintest idea what could happen to me, but I certainly know what I do not want to do.’

‘What is this you do not want to do, Prim?’

‘Don’t call me Prim, I hate it. What I don’t want to do is what everyone else does.’

‘Yes, it goes without saying that you succeed in creating quite a few problems.’

Father O’Connor pays his visits not only in order to celebrate Sunday Mass, but because the only female Carrington child intrigues him:

‘When the moon is full I sleep really badly.’

‘Why?’

‘It’s because she’s a she-wolf,’ interrupts Gerard. ‘Haven’t you heard her howl at the moon?’

‘One night I saw a mark on the carpet and, since I didn’t remember having spilt anything there, I looked up and saw how the moon’s reflection had landed at my feet. Is it true the moon has a store of fourteen thousand curses? Once I saw it drown in the lake. Is there water on the moon, Father O’Connor?’

‘If there is water then there is life.’

‘But *is* there water?’

‘I don’t think that scientists have found any yet.’

The girl surprises him. To him, curiosity is the greatest virtue, just as wisdom is the goal of every desire. Who knows where her erratic temperament could lead her?

‘The moon is a desert with craters on it,’ Pat informs her.

There is no way to get through to the young Leonora. Those who know her and make the attempt have no inkling of what will happen next. She laughs only occasionally, which is why Father O’Connor enjoys seeing her smile and hearing her giggle. When she tells him the human race is in no way superior to the equine one, she convinces him it is as she says.

3. THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

HAROLD CARRINGTON SUMMONS his daughter to the library.

'Your mother and I have decided to send you to convent school.'

A child is powerless. Once the adults have made a decision they point at the door and say: 'Away to the convent with you!' and in so doing, they divest themselves of the child.

'Your education is costing us more than your brothers',' Maurie pleads, placating her with the explanation: 'One has to be strict with children, to see them properly educated; if one is lax, they can go to rack and ruin.'

The Convent of the Holy Sepulchre occupies a palace built for Henry VIII at Newhall near Chelmsford, the town in Essex where Oscar Wilde was incarcerated.

The vast dormitory hardly inspires confidence. The windows are narrow and it is impossible to see outside without climbing on to a chair, except that there are no chairs, other than the night matron's, which looks as if it collapsed sometime around a thousand years BC. The length of the two side walls are hung with curtains made of a cloth that resembles linoleum to divide off the beds with their thin mattresses and hard pillows. The first thing the girls do after their morning genuflections is to empty their chamber pots.

'Don't you complain. All of us just sleep on a board on a bare floor and we fast, and we put crowns of thorns on our heads for the love of Jesus Christ during Holy Week. Look, I've still got the scars here,' one of the novices explains to Leonora.

'Silence!' commands the Mother Superior.

What do you do with silence? To begin with, Leonora gulps it down. At Crookhey Hall she used to talk to Nanny and Gerard. Now she knows that silence is solitude.

Tables as long as Lent are the first thing you see on entering the refectory. Sisters wearing white caps and aprons serve the girls swiftly. The Mother Superior sits at the head of the table and reads loudly from the Bible. The only sound is that of spoons scraping the bottom of soup plates. How convenient that in such a tedious place the sisters get lunch over and done with quickly!

'I've just seen a griffin.'

'There are no griffins here.' The nun is getting annoyed.

'Yes there are. In the corners of the chapel … Or maybe it's just Father Carpenter, half lion and half eagle.'

The nuns huddle inside their black habits. To Leonora, walking behind them, their backs look like a pack of wild boar.

In class, told how Moses parted the Red Sea and Joshua caused

the sun to pause on its path to its zenith, she thinks: 'I could do that.' Cosmic laws are a natural part of her life.

'We have to cut your hair.'

'No.'

'Your hair is the cause of your vanity.'

Ebony curls fall to the floor, forming a ring around Leonora, whose tears are tumbling out. She attempts to wipe them away with a lock of hair as she used to, but there isn't any left long enough. Finally, the nun takes pity on her:

'You look pretty with this haircut.'

'I look hideous.'

Where are you, Lake Windermere? Where are you, Nanny?

The saints and martyrs in the chapel are fantastical beings who fly from one plinth to the next. A lion about to devour one of the first female Christian martyrs pauses beneath the ferocity of her glare and, instead of eating her up, throws himself at her feet imploring mercy. St. Patrick opens his arms to her, St. Ursula weeps salt tears, and in the convent corridors, stories are related of a nun whom the bishop himself visits. She bears the stigmata and every year during Holy Week the wounds made by the nails piercing her hands and feet open, and her side flows with black and viscous blood.

Leonora spends many hours in the chapel, inflamed by her devotion to the saints. She closes her eyes before the altar. She acquires the absolute conviction that her feet no longer touch the floor and she is levitating.

With her eyes tight shut, she informs the Mother Superior: 'Mother I have just levitated.' She also tells her that she can hear the plants grow at night and that she has seen a tiny tiger rowing his raft across the holy water stoup.

'If I enter the convent and make my vows, shall I become a saint?'

'It's out of the question that a disobedient child and a fantasist such as you could make a saint!'

'Joan of Arc is my source of inspiration, and I burn as fervently as she ever did!'

'It is your pride that tells you this.'

The girl terrifies the Mother Superior, her behaviour ruffles the smooth surface of her certainties. She is different to the other girls in that she is slow to obey, as if she were leading a life apart. She suddenly breaks into prayer in a sonorous voice, finishing well after the others, her final Amen echoing back from the stained glass windows. What world is she living in? She unexpectedly punctuates the silent periods with incomprehensible pronouncements. 'Ninety-nine horses in sheep's clothing have just entered the chapel,' she informs everyone. 'Let's go and play at being shepherdesses.'

The Reverend Mother is never pleased to cross her path. Impossible to catch hold of, furtive, light as a spirit, you never hear her approach. Mother Teresa watches her run in the garden or kneel in the chapel, and wishes she could make her disappear. In the refectory, while a nun reads aloud the life of Jesus, Leonora keeps her eyes glued to her and forgets to eat, or else interrupts inappropriately. 'Was Christ a man or a crucifix?', or 'What is the purpose of the mortification of the flesh?'

'May she depart from here rapidly! Her parents sent her to us to be turned into someone else. How can someone so far down the road into eccentricity become someone different?'

Her classmates don't like her any better, she is a pariah who does not know what it means to belong to the upper classes, nor to be educated in this British convent school for the daughters of the privileged.

Leonora turns down shared daily duties and refuses to play with the others during break times. One girl vows she has seen her talking to herself. It is hard to engage with her inflammatory personality. Her eyes resemble two black billy goats — or black cats — or black bulls about to charge. She talks about the strangest things, and hides herself away in order to draw pictures of animals with human faces in her exercise book. She reddens the eyes of her horses and wild boars with blood-vermilion ink she makes herself, and she announces she's not afraid of them, or witches, or ghosts. 'Leonora has made a pact with the devil!' In the convent there is always more talk of the devil than of Jesus Christ.

Long ago, witches were burned at the stake in Lancaster's main square. The enclosed order of nuns are the brides of God or Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, or at least of St. Joseph. They undertake life in their cloister as if possessed, and awaken each morning with dark shadows under their eyes. They eat the same food as the girls. Leonora knows as much because she has seen the Reverend Mother at the porter's lodge with a spinach leaf caught between her teeth. Occasionally, a lock of curly hair escapes from beneath their coifs. So they do have hair? They smell of sweat when the hour of the Angelus sounds. Their work-worn hands are tipped with blackened fingernails. What must their toenails look like? Leonora suspiciously avoids them as she does her classmates. She prefers the company of the *sidhes*. Mischievous and miniature, their accomplice Leonora instructs them to play with the nuns' rosary beads, tug at their veils, or untie their shoelaces. Tomorrow they are bound to put salt in the jam at breakfast time.

'Mother Superior smells like a goat.'

'The devil too is a black goat.'

Leonora would like to befriend another restless soul but she can't find a single one.

Her secret is to be different.

'Silence!'

Silence engenders introspection. Or sleepiness.

Several of them fall asleep like cows during meditation hour.

Anything that breaks the everyday rhythm is unsettling. Leonora is capable of writing ambidextrously, even of writing backwards with her left hand. In earliest childhood her governess attempted to tie one hand behind her. But she takes up her pencil with her right hand and draws, then does so with her left, only better, using both hemispheres of her brain. The nuns consider her a queer fish. From the start Nanny had told her: 'Only very few people can do what you do, it's a gift, and when you write left-handed you do so without wobbles or scribbles or a single mistake.' The nuns consider that, along with being a rebel, Leonora has some kind of a mental defect, since nobody can write and draw with both hands.

In the seventeenth century, Lancashire was a notorious centre of witchcraft. It lay under a layer of soot and its Neolithic boulders bore witness to its pagan past. Betrothed to Beelzebub, the witches in their towers transformed men into pigs or wolves. On the ground lie ancient stone wheels with strange hieroglyphs carved into them, and it is an historical fact that twelve persons accused of sorcery were hung one dawn on Pendle Hill. Even today, a tall dark tower rises over Lancaster and they say that cries and lamentations can be heard coming from its dungeons, where the prisoners were held until their death.

The Mother Superior becomes convinced that Leonora must be rusticated: this belief is further corroborated when one day the Mother Superior falls ill with flu, and Leonora relays a message informing her that a wagtail had landed upon her windowsill from Ireland to proclaim her imminent death.

'Reverend Mother, you have but a few days to live.'

'Child, the Mother Superior awaits you in her office.'

'Did she not die?'

The father confessor and all the nuns of the Convent of the Holy Sepulchre determine to expel her. When she hears her sentence, Leonora holds her head up as high as would Winkie, her mare.

'In addition to her extremely unusual conduct, your daughter has not managed to make a single friend, thus showing herself incapable of integrating into our community.' So the Mother Superior informs Harold Wilde-Carrington.

He becomes enraged with Leonora and tells her: 'You are a truly impossible child.'

Leonora is a floating leaf of paper that will combust itself, without anyone being able to do anything about it. Neither her mother nor her father can do a thing to avert a conflagration.

Thanks to the intervention of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Lancaster, who takes tea with the Carrington family, Leonora is admitted to a second convent school, that of St. Mary's, Ascot. There, too, the nuns prove to be addicted to the crown of thorns.

After the black veils, blood stains.

Maurie insists upon a single room for her daughter and in so doing unwittingly separates her from the other girls.

The teacher points at a desk at the back of the classroom and interrogates the new pupil from her podium:

'What are you doing, Carrington?'

'Drawing horses.'

She is immediately moved to the front row, where a strict eye is kept on her.

'Why do you insist upon being different?' the Mother Superior reprimands her.

'It's just that I *am* different.'

The teacher complains: 'She forgets everything and is distracted by anything, as much at play as at work. She'll suddenly absent herself and nothing whatever can bring her back to earth.'

'It's her Irish blood. Ireland is home to idiots and lunatics,' replies the Mother Superior.

Patricia Paterson, Leonora's cousin and fellow pupil at St. Mary's, prefers her to her other friends.

'I am opposed to all forms of discipline,' she tells Leonora. 'And if you don't want to get boxed in, things would go better for you if you did like me: just obey.' When Leonora listens to music, her face looks at peace, the sounds of the chapel organ envelop her and she forgets all else. She plays the piano well and the nuns attempt to encourage her musical abilities, and to persuade her to join the choir.

Leonora responds by obtaining a saw from which she extracts a painful noise. 'It's my violin,' she explains to the choir mistress, who refuses to let her give the concert she longs to. 'I feel a part of this music. Or else just give me some paints and brushes and leave me alone.' Her black eyes flash daggers in self-defence.

'You are possessed,' declares her teacher.

Leonora disobeys every order and continues to write backwards with her left hand.

She carries on smoking deep inside the fake grotto to Our Lady of Lourdes, until she stands accused by one of the novices.

'So you indulge in this particular vice,' says the Mother Superior, corroborating the evidence.

‘Yes, since I was young.’

‘Does your family know about it?’

‘Nanny does. She told me that if I went on like this, it’d be impossible for a chimney sweep to get down my throat without turning black.’

‘Where do you obtain the cigarettes?’

‘My father has a cigarette box full of them.’

Before the school year was out, she was expelled once more. Patricia Paterson accompanied her to the grille in the front door. ‘It was playing the saw that finally did it.’

Leonora is ten years old when the Carringtons, together with Nanny, decamp lock, stock and barrel to Hazelwood, a less opulent house than Crookhey Hall, and within reach of the salty sea breeze. It has fewer dark corridors and poky passages than Crookhey, making it impossible to play ghosts with Gerard, but the scent of the sea makes up for everything. Crookhey Hall’s drawing room was impressive and a spinning wheel in one corner attracted unfailing attention. There was a quantity of mirrors and lances, but what attracted most attention were the suits of armour once again standing guard in the new living room at Hazelwood. There was even one occasion when Leonora and Gerard clambered onto the roof at Crookhey and viewed the whole of Great Britain. In Hazelwood, all they can do is ponder on the meaning of three dark, grand arches leading nowhere.

4. MISS PENROSE

THIS TIME THE BISHOP OF LANCASTER declined to assist: 'Not only did she take up smoking,' Maurie explains to Harold, 'your daughter accused the Reverend Mother of having a wart sprouting two white hairs on her chin.'

'Doesn't she?' enquired Harold Carrington.

'Yes, but it is more polite to exercise discretion.'

'What are we going to do with you?' Maurie regards her daughter with apprehension. 'Your father is so livid he had one of his turns at the Club.'

'All I want to do is paint.'

'You are not in a position to decide your future life at the age of fifteen.' Harold Carrington is becoming annoyed. 'Before your presentation at Court, we are going to send you to Florence so that Miss Penrose can teach you some proper manners.'

That evening, Leonora goes into her father's library.

'Papa, will you please allow me to ask you a question?'

'Yes, go ahead.'

'Do you believe in God?'

Taken by surprise, Harold Carrington looks his daughter in the eye: 'I have never seen Him.'

Her father is an intelligent man, no doubt about it. So why on earth had he sent her to those convent schools? Why is he so hard on her? 'A proper preparation for marriage is a woman's salvation,' she overheard him say one evening.

Her mother stands by her and encourages her. She presents her with a box full of oil paints and brushes.

Leonora believes in apparitions, not like the Blessed Virgin at Lourdes, but those beings who suddenly appear from around a corner to either assault or take you by the hand. From the age of two onwards, from the time she woke up she talked about the visions she'd had in her sleep. Without thinking further back than yesterday, she had spied a figure walking slowly along the roof of Hazelwood, and who continued walking beyond the edge of the roof. He must surely have killed himself when he fell. Leonora hurried out to search for him, but couldn't find anyone there.

'It's a ghost,' Nanny confirmed to her. 'You are possessed of the gift of second sight, but this is something best not discussed, least of all with your father.'

Leonora is different, and nobody understands her, with the exception of her accomplices, Nanny and Gerard.

'It is high time you left off playing with Tartar, you're too old still

to be playing with him, he's a child's toy,' the head of the family cautions her.

Leonora bawls her protest.

'It's for your own good, I've already told you that. Furthermore, that rocking horse is so old it's only good for burning in the fireplace. You've got all the use you can out of him.'

'No, Papa, no! Not that! Not Tartar! Do anything else you want, only not Tartar!'

'Tartar is for little children. I shall burn him myself until there's nothing at all left of him. You need to grow up, you are far too old for a toy like him.'

'He's not a toy. Tartar is *me.*'

Leonora howls. Her teeth chatter. Harold Carrington covers his ears and orders the rocking horse to be burnt.

'Bring her a cup of tea,' Carrington orders, and departs with his head held low. Where on earth did this girl come from? However could he get her to understand? How does one raise a wild mare? How is it possible for a wooden horse to so disturb a young girl in this manner?

'Shame on you, Leonora.' The girl whinnies, paws the ground, kicks out and froths at the mouth.

At midnight, thin and ridden with shivers, she is racing to look for Gerard.

'I heard some terrible neighing, I'm sure it was Tartar, they are dismembering him!'

'Yes, I saw how Father sneaked upstairs carrying your rocking horse in his arms. He is clearly set on inflicting the vilest tortures.'

'Do something, Gerard!'

'The deed is already done! The head of Tartar has already fallen!'

'I shall neither eat nor drink again.'

Gerard consoles her. 'What goes on in your head, Prim, seems like waves of electricity suddenly being short-circuited.'

The school for aristocrats in Florence's Piazza Donatello is a manual of good behaviour and *savoir faire*. The teachers, headed up by Miss Penrose, instruct their charges in how to behave in society; how to be an efficient lady of the house, seating her guests according to rank at the dinner table; how to introduce and maintain an informed and intelligent conversation with the person on one's right, and then on one's left; how to suppress a sob or a giggle; how to behave exactly like everyone else; how to treat poor relations with compassion, assuming they fall into poverty through their inability to manage their lives better; how to train dogs and clean up their mess, and how to avoid stepping on the cat's tail. In addition, her education was to be complemented by training in the sports of horse-riding and fencing.

Leonora, who in addition to English already speaks French, now acquires Italian and amazes herself by this mission of self-discovery.

'What are you doing, Miss Carrington?' the headmistress enquires on seeing her crouched over her exercise book.

'I am composing a manual of disobedience.'

'Your mother informed me you were interested in drawing.'

'Now it's writing.'

At break time Miss Penrose, who never leaves the building without first putting on a hat and gloves, studies her pupils through the window and observes Leonora instructing them: 'We are now going to play horses.'

Most agree, and most of all Elizabeth Apple. They begin a kind of wild dance, stampeding in all directions, until the tea table is upended and its china tea set smashed. They continue on at a canter, out into the garden, manes flowing as tremulously as waterfalls, as they ride on one another's backs, whinnying.

'Girls, what is going on? Have you completely lost your heads?'

Miss Penrose cannot believe her eyes. From the family home at Hazelwood, Carrington assures her that he will reimburse her twice the cost of the tea table and its shattered porcelain tea set.

'My daughter will never do such a thing again. From now on, she is forbidden to play at horses.'

She is both Miss Penrose's youngest and most original disciple. The headmistress studies how she responds. Leonora's eyes open wide as she appears to be listening to a voice within her. The deepest depths of her eyes emit signals of light. She enters museum galleries with reverence, attempting to muffle even the sound of her shoes on the floor, keeping her hand over her mouth. Is she suffering palpitations? Since the museum guard allows nobody to cross the wire, she keeps her distance to admire the paintings, fearful of activating the alarm. She returns over and again to the same pictures, and Miss Penrose asks her:

'Why are you so particularly impressed by the Sienese School of Francesco di Giorgio and Giovanni di Paolo?'

'Because of their use of colour, especially their shades of vermilion, chestnut, gold — oh how I love that gold! I would like to use those colours in my own painting. How was it possible for Cimabue to be so ahead of his time?'

Her friend Elizabeth Apple shares her enthusiasm. The two take notes and repeatedly escape Miss Penrose, especially during lessons in etiquette or in learning how to date antiques. Neither of them are particularly interested in learning whether a piece of furniture belonged to the period of the Directory or to Louis XV.

'Let's go to Siena, Elizabeth!'

‘They could expel us for that!’

‘How can you be so easily scared?’

Leonora decided they should take a bus there without first informing Miss Penrose. They go via Arezzo to visit the work of Piero della Francesca.

Elizabeth is a coward and attempts to restrain her. ‘Let’s not go down this alley, it’s very dark’; ‘I think there’s a man following us’; ‘We’d better go back now.’ The last thing Leonora wants to do is to go back now, and she enters an antique-shop-cum-cavern-of-delights covered in dust and cobwebs, the fibres of which form bridges between the hand of a metal charioteer and a porcelain plate before continuing on to envelop a Florentine dagger. ‘We recovered these books from a Venetian palace,’ comments a different kind of shipwreck survivor, an old man, indicating a yellowing stack. Who knows what varieties of fungus are growing in this disturbing Aladdin’s cave?

Leonora feels in her element, curious and confident in equal measure. In here, even the dust is magical. Suddenly, in the midst of all the objects, there shines a pair of yellow cat’s eyes. There are quantities of cats in Florence, and in Rome their cradle is the Colosseum. Leonora wishes she could live out her days in just such a cave, for she knows she would feel secure there. She experiences a similar sense of exaltation in Florence when she crosses the Piazza della Signoria, the Ponte Vecchio, the Piazza del Duomo and the Lungarno.

Her veneration puts no brake on her audacity: she caresses the statues and climbs up to the altar in St. Peter’s Basilica to view the tabernacle of the Holy Sacrament at close quarters. If anyone had seen her, she would have been shown the door. She acts without due circumspection, without bowing her head or crossing herself. She walks along the banks of the Arno, in the Oltrarno, through the Lungarno Serristori, where the green of the park reminds her of her mother’s native Ireland. From a woody embankment on one side of the river she can see not only the opposite bank, but right into the city as far as the Uffizi Gallery.

One morning, torrential rain causes the Arno to burst its banks, covering the statues in mud. In response a different flood, one of young people from across the whole of Italy, gather at the National Library, to salvage the books at risk. There Leonora meets Giovanni, a young man in his twenties, with striking eyes and an easy smile who, together with the rest, is removing mud from the books, one page at a time.

‘I arrived from Rome by motorbike with my friends,’ he tells her with a smile.

‘Where do you sleep? And where do you eat?’

‘I sleep in a fabulous *wagon-lit* train compartment parked on some dead rails, and people on the nearby street provide us with food and treats. I’ve never eaten so well in my life! As for you, what do you do?’

‘I write and draw with both hands, it’s my special gift.’

‘It’s a gift like being able to wiggle your ears.’

‘No, it’s something only I can do. It’s me who’s special.’

‘I think you might be right,’ Giovanni smiles broadly as he says goodbye.

Her friends suggest they go and have tea at the Giubbe Rosse. Leonora is keen:

‘Please may I bring Giovanni Proiettis? He’s one of the students who came here from Rome to rescue the books from the library.’

‘Your parents wouldn’t approve,’ is Miss Penrose’s response, from high above her twiggy legs.

Rather than offer her support, the fair-haired and languid Elizabeth Apple comments:

‘I wouldn’t dream of embarking on a relationship with someone utterly unknown.’

‘But you and I were utterly unknown to one another when we came through the door of Miss Penrose’s establishment.’

‘That doesn’t count, since we belong to the same social class.’

‘I don’t belong to any class at all. I am a horse.’

‘Oh come on, Leonora, *please*.’

‘I’m going to see this young man, whether they allow me or not. If you like, you can tell Miss Penrose that I’ve arranged to meet him in the Uffizi Gallery.’

‘Is that where you’ve been meeting up with him so far?’

‘Obviously, yes. And I like him better today than I did yesterday, and tomorrow I shall most likely like him better still.’

Miss Penrose writes to Harold Carrington: ‘Your daughter is overly temperamental.’

Leonora’s passions are aroused by every new painter she discovers. ‘That’s how I’d like to paint, that’s who I want to be.’

It proves impossible to get her out of the museum. One afternoon she can’t be found, until Miss Penrose encounters her seated in front of Simone Martini’s *Annunciation.*

‘The Virgin is in a bad mood. She doesn’t want to have to be the Mother of God.’

‘Your daughter is uncontrollable,’ reads the next message to Maurie. ‘No-one ever has the least idea what she’ll do next, nor how she’s going to react.’

If getting to know Padua, Venice and Rome lifts her out of herself,

Florence makes her fall in love. In the Uffizi Gallery, Leonora discovers Uccello and, most of all, Arcimboldo. His portraits apparently composed of vegetables draw her back to the fine line between reality and imagination, about which she talked so much with the Jesuit, Father O'Connor. Arcimboldo's strange heads composed of roots, fruit and legumes — are they hallucinations? Are his mental faculties different to those of other men? She is attracted by lips composed of mushrooms, strawberries or cherries. At times the cherries are used for eyes, and turn red. 'This painter has to be sick,' comments Miss Penrose, who serves as their guide. Leonora feels a surge of rage rise in her throat.

'This painter has an overwhelming imagination. He is a genius!'

'He is abnormal.'

'Then I too would like to be abnormal, just like him.'

During the winter holidays of 1932, Leonora goes to Switzerland with her parents, staying near to the Jungfrau glacier. Her mother ice-skates and her father devotes himself to his beloved curling. Leonora goes skiing but takes a fall, something that provokes several spectators to rush to her rescue. Abashed, she informs them that her sport is riding, which she knows how to do well. A group of young people invite her to descend from the snowy peaks in their sleigh, then to go out dancing in the evening. They share a *fondue* and they are captivated by her, then annoyed because she prefers the company of two St. Bernards who follow her all the way home to her bedroom with a mountain of snow on each paw.

'Miss Carrington, this is forbidden. Dogs must be kept outside.'

'Miss Carrington, animals must not be brought into the dining room.'

So Leonora takes off for the whole day with the dogs, and Harold Carrington is annoyed in his turn. Why can't his only daughter behave like other girls? Leonora sees horses made of ice between the trees, the slightest sound reminds her of cantering horses, she finds the imprint of hooves in the snow, and the blinding whiteness of the snowflakes form the back of an immense mare covering the earth.

A telegram arrives in Switzerland from Florence. Miss Penrose informs her that her room-mate, Elizabeth Apple, has caught an infectious disease: scarlet fever.

Immediately, Leonora is doubled over. A searing pain paralyses her right leg.

'It's an attack of appendicitis,' the hotel doctor diagnoses, more accustomed to attending to broken bones. 'She needs to be taken at once to hospital in Berne.'

When she awakens, the first thing Leonora sees is her mother's face:

‘It is beyond doubt that riding so much has led to your intestines getting tied into knots.’

‘How can you say something so stupid?’ she overhears her father saying.

So he is here in the hospital. His dark voice, in stark contrast to the surrounding whiteness, is worrying.

When she is allowed to get up, her father helps her walk.

‘At Hazelwood you’ll convalesce more rapidly.’

A fortnight later, Leonora enters his library and asks him:

‘There must be an awful lot of schools for young ladies in Paris, mustn’t there?’

Harold and Maurie Carrington agree with her, her mother positively enthusiastic.

‘It is very easy to get to Paris, and I’ll come and see you there after the next charity auction in Islington.’

5. THE SCENT OF CHESTNUT TREES

SPEAKING FRENCH SINCE CHILDHOOD is an asset, since it permits Leonora to walk fearlessly about Paris. Streets exercise far stronger powers of seduction than school for her.

'Where are you going to, Leonora?'

'Out into the street.'

'But you have a class in French literature.'

'I learn more out of doors. The whole history of France lies in its paving stones. And I'm intrigued by how men's trousers protrude from under the *pissoirs.*'

'If you persist in breaking the rules, we shall be obliged to expel you.'

'Nothing would give me greater pleasure.'

They expel her again. Why is it so hard to change her ways? Her monthly allowance will have to be cut, in order to tame her by imposing restrictions. Her irate father moves her to a school with a harsher reputation: Miss Sampson's Paris establishment. There her tiny room has a view over the cemetery. 'I refuse to remain in this prison, it brings bad luck.' She escapes and seeks out a Professor of Fine Arts known to her parents, Simon, who, on seeing how firmly her mind is made up, opens his door to her. The ferocity of this young girl in some way resembles that of the early Knights Templar or the Illuminati. It is difficult to reject her and yes, Leonora is more at ease because Simon allows her to spend all day in front of the *Mona Lisa* in the Louvre, go up the Rue des Beaux Arts and walk at dusk along the Seine, which she observes from the Pont Neuf, chatting with whomever attracts her attention. Simon even accompanies her along the *quais,* seeking out books on alchemy on the bookstalls, and sharing a coffee with her in cafés on Saint-Germain-des-Prés. His sole stipulation is that she returns by ten-thirty at night.

Whenever she runs out of money, she goes to the Ritz, where her father keeps a permanent suite and Jules the porter is mortified by the state of her shoes.

'It's because I walk around so much.'

'Please don't concern yourself. Here, take these francs, and I'll put them on your father's account. If you stay in Paris long enough, you'll learn how to recognise the scent of the chestnut trees.'

Her mother rescues her, arriving in Paris with train tickets to travel wherever they choose.

'They say that if you miss out on a romantic date or a trip to Paris, you die without knowing that you have lived,' Maurie happily explains. She is a keen traveller and knows that her daughter is an

incomparable companion, whenever she chooses to be so.

Maurie can see Harold's character traits reflected in Leonora; they exercise the same power over other people. The head of Imperial Chemical Industries rules the world and Leonora faces up to him: where on earth does she find the gall to do this?

'Your father does not understand your behaviour, all he looks forward to is your presentation at Court, hoping that there at least you'll find your head.'

Visiting museums in Italy and France with Leonora is like going on two journeys at the same time: a traditional one and the magical one her daughter is always embarked on.

'Look Mummy, this is a Brueghel. Let me see the wall caption, but I am certain that it is really him.'

Maurie is filled with pride that her daughter recognises each artist by their paintings.

'I would like to go to Germany to see the Brueghels there. And Heironymus Bosch, Grünewald and Cranach. I would also like to see Hans Baldung's *The Knight, the Young Maiden and Death* and Caspar David Friedrich's series on *The Ruins of Eldena Abbey*.'

Leonora spends long hours in front of each painting, observing it with reverence, taking out her notebook, making rapid sketches. She departs the museum only reluctantly, and sits contemplatively on the edge of the fountain while her mother consults the Baedeker, and decides what they'll go and visit the next day.

Leonora has an appetite for every type of food, tasting aubergines and risotto, ordering the house wine. She smiles and flirts with the bell boy, the porter, the hotel manager, the key manager, and the man with a moustache and beard at the adjacent table. Not to mention the handsome young man who invites her to dance.

Every guest leaves their shoes outside their room door for them to be polished, and Leonora swaps them around the corridor. At night, as they fall asleep, mother and daughter reprise their accounts of the day, and their vivid commentaries surpass the lived experience. To Maurie, all is transformed into a fiesta. How delightful it would be to always live like that! Despite the fact that to Leonora it is wholly incomprehensible that any woman would wish to be married to Harold Carrington, Maurie's life had at least been made easy.

'Your father is a highly attractive man.'

'I hardly think so.'

'He's a man of character.'

'That I'm well aware of it, as I suffer from it.'

'He is endowed with a superior intelligence.'

'In this respect I agree with you.'

'What we are we owe to your father.'

‘I do not owe him a thing,’ Leonora replies with irritation.

Ever since she left Ireland at the age of eighteen, Maurie Moorhead had lived life as a vertiginous round of entertainment. Games of croquet (ugh, how Leonora loathed them); hunting in red jackets on red horses with red foxhounds after a red fox; charity sales; bridge parties; massages booked with Madame Pomeroy at Piccadilly Circus; hair salons; beauty treatments; fittings for the latest garments at top couture houses: the fact that Maurie creates the latest fashion without ever being *in* fashion is just part of her charm. According to Leonora, their mother-and-daughter partnership unfailingly arrives either early or late to every occasion.

‘The catwalks displaying the latest in French haute couture,’ says Maurie, ‘they are the starting point of fashion worldwide.’

‘Just like at the horse races?’ asks Leonora, enchanted by the insane creativity of Schiaparelli in the Place Vendôme.

‘Let’s go to Lanvin, we can call in at Poiret, even if we end up in Au Printemps.’

Maurie is disappointed at being unable to find coffee-coloured satin knickers. She is also obsessed with procuring leather buttons for a tweed bag she has, and none of the ones she finds are quite to her taste.

‘We might as well be in London,’ she tells Leonora, ‘and I could find the same ones in Regent Street and at half the price…’

‘One doesn’t come to Paris to purchase buttons.’

‘So what do we come here for?’

‘To buy a Van Gogh.’

Maurie selects a sailor’s cap which suits her very poorly. Leonora is amused to discover a nightclub on the Rue de Boissy d’Anglas called The Ox on the Roof and asks the maître d’ there — who looks like he could well be a member of the French Academy — where the place got its name. He replies: ‘In honour of Jean Cocteau, who comes here from time to time. I think tonight may in fact be his night.’

Maurie flatly refuses to go to any cabaret until she has found her satin knickers.

‘No — let’s instead go for tea at Rumpelmayer.’

While Maurie takes her nap, Leonora goes to the Café de Flore without her purse. In France, it’s so easy to drink a glass — or two — and pay up an hour — or two — later. By then her mother will have woken up. She orders a cocoa.

‘There is no cocoa,’ answers the waiter. *‘Café au lait,* herb tea, black tea, hot chocolate, wine, beer if you will, but no cocoa.’

‘*Thé, alors*.’

At the next table is a young man who won’t stop staring at her.

‘I assume you are English, since you have ordered tea. I have been

to London, and found the Thames very pretty. Then I stayed on in Southampton, which was very green.'

'Yes, I suppose it would be green. The green of Ireland is of a shade that makes it look as if there were a fire under the ground beneath it.'

Thus an hour went by and the young man, Paul Aspel, requested that she join him for dinner, Leonora suddenly comes to her senses.

'I need to go and collect my mother. I'll be back in a minute.'

Back at the hotel, Maurie warns her daughter not to talk to strangers. 'It is badly looked upon for a young woman to sit down alone in a café.'

'Why?'

'Because you attract far too much attention, and it appears you are looking for clients.'

'I don't understand what you mean, Mama. The nuns never told me about any of this.'

In her turn, Maurie weaves a web of restrictions and abstinence around her daughter, which causes Leonora to look daggers at her. Maurie intends to drown her in an ocean of rules. It is unthinkable to infringe them because her Carrington parents have educated her to exalt their name, their ancestry, their good reputation and the family glory.

'Mama, living according to the rules of others is an illness.'

'You are a part of Society, your heritage …'

'Everything you're saying is nonsense. All these taboos … to me the only taboo I recognise is using face powder.'

'No, Leonora. They are nothing more than counsels for you to live in harmony with your own nature, with your own family history, and with the grandeur of your home nation. You *are* your nation. You are Great Britain.'

'I am Leonora, *not* the British Empire.'

'Don't dismiss your forebears: you are your ancestors, too.

Oscar Wilde is in your neurons, he is the reason you are as you are — rebellious, unattainable, and — just like him — you don't measure the consequences of your actions.'

Leonora alleges, as she did before in Crookhey, that none of this heraldry has the least effect on her; on the contrary, instead of inflating the importance of her past, she minimises it with her impish smile. 'My mother is a snob,' she mutters under her breath. In many families, the zeal for a glorious past is irresistible, rooted in human nature as it is, to such an extent that hotel owners, car salesmen, perfume and tobacco sellers all seek to acquire a heraldic shield or a family coat of arms for their business, their brandy or their wine.

'Receiving the benefits of merchandise you have not made

yourself does not appear to me aristocratic. That reduces it to the level of a trade.' They also discuss the question of good taste, because Maurie is forever striving to divide things into matters of good or poor taste.

'All that is entirely relative,' avers Leonora. 'What you like might repel me and vice versa.'

'No, Leonora, you have been educated in good taste, and if you overlook this first principle, you cut yourself off from your class.'

The *maitre d'hôtel* murmurs the year and vintage of every wine into the ear of each guest as he pours from the bottle. When he utters '*Grand vin de Château Latour 1905*' Leonora is in no doubt that she is tasting something extraordinary, something old and wise while at the same time so fresh and cheerful that it could have been made yesterday. She sips it as if it were Communion wine.

'It is their wine that renders the French a race apart,' she informs Maurie, 'they owe their genius to this wine.'

Within a month, she has learnt to recognise and return a corked wine, one whose colour looks deadened and whose taste is wooden, as against another *bouchonné*, whose cork has rotted to powder.

'I would like to be as rich and sparkling and free as a Veuve Cliquot or Pol Roger.'

'You have your own lineage in Lancashire.'

'I am not going to shackle myself to that place, or shrivel to a corpse like Mary Edgeworth. I don't want to become asphyxiated by skeletons; I am my own mother and my own father. I am a one-off phenomenon.'

Maurie turns her head aside so that Leonora can't see her tears welling up. Leonora is her mortification: a strange creature who has emerged from the fold where her brothers still peaceably graze.

They arrive at the Hôtel du Palais in Biarritz in the midst of a February snowstorm. Maurie takes it as a personal insult that snow should fall on the eve of spring, and is convinced that the world is turning off its orbit.

'It's obvious why Biarritz is empty. Next year we shall go to Torquay. Not only is it cheaper, but the climate is better there, too.'

Skiing in St. Moritz, summering in Eden Roc are fixed items in their annual agenda; moving around from place to place in a Bentley or a Rolls Royce is a part of their everyday life.

As soon as they arrive in Monte Carlo, Maurie shuts herself away in the casino.

'Is this your spiritual retreat?' enquires Leonora.

Ever greedy, Maurie always wishes to dine punctually, and the next day she delights in the memory of what she has eaten, whereas Leonora never remembers.

‘Mama, you’re just like the Cheshire Cat, licking your whiskers over and over.’

Leonora observes every last gesture of her fellow diners. She flirts with the employee of a travel agency who sells them tickets to visit Taormina, and from there to continue on through Sicily. The Italians observe the way she walks and comment aloud on her *culino*. In Taormina, the head waiter Dante is her new romance. He sells them a cut-price Fra Angelico which turns out to be a forgery.

Back in Paris once more, Leonora goes riding in the morning, attends a polo match at noon, and dances all night. To be young, beautiful and rich is no bad hand to have been dealt in life. Maurie shares in her daughter’s success because going anywhere with her, entering a room and seeing how they all pause to stare at her, is — to say the least — gratifying. Every café seems to greet them with open arms, and they enjoy their *apéritif* in one and their meal in the next, while Maurie is advised on how her daughter is at least as marvellous as the *Soles Meunières* that both mother and daughter allow to deliquesce in their mouths. Leonora takes charge of ordering the wine, she knows all there is to know about Pouilly-Fuissé, and goes so far as to indulge herself in returning inferior bottles. Her mother watches her in astonishment. They have all the time in the world, for the whole of life lies ahead of them.

‘What other tasty morsels are waiting to be crushed between our fine white teeth?’ enquires Leonora. ‘We are like harpies.’

Morning porridge in Lancashire seems a very long way away. Leonora now recognises every vintage of wine poured into her glass.

‘As happy as May Queens,’ her mother agrees.

Leonora raises her arms, tosses her splendidly flowing locks over her shoulders and laughs aloud, showing all her teeth.

‘Leonora, people are staring at you.’

‘No, Mama. The person they’re looking at is you.’

Mistinguette dances for them in the Folies Bergères and Maurie declares:

‘These naked women bore me. The Greeks did the exact same thing centuries ago.’

She is still preoccupied by the lack of coffee-coloured satin knickers. In the Bal Tabarin, Leonora dances with an Armenian who calls on her at the hotel the next morning. Maurie hastily purchases tickets to leave Paris before the Armenian can turn up to sell them an icon.

‘Respectability is the most boring thing in the world. Not to Venice, please not, Mama. All the English go there.’

‘I’ve said we’re going to Venice.’

To Leonora, Venice is Thomas Mann’s Von Aschenbach, a

hallucination in the mists, a lagoon of seawater on the point of dying, just like the lake into which she galloped her mare as a young girl. Everything is decaying, the detritus accumulates in the heavy blood of moribund Venice, but Maurie's relish for life turns back the black tide of mortality. 'Lord Byron came here,' she insists. In the Lido, Leonora fails to recognise the sun-soaked beach on which Von Aschenbach first saw Tadzio's divine aspect, entering his being as the filthy water now invades Venice. Maurie goes crazy for the gondoliers; not so Leonora, to whom the *gondolieri* seem false and theatrical. She rejects a return to a Venetian past in these stagnant waters, in which to fall is to meet death by poisoning.

'Prince Umberto Corti wishes to invite us to his villa, which everyone says is magnificent.'

'I refuse to visit one more marbled apartment …'

In Rome they cross the St Peter's Square and enter the basilica, where Leonora refuses to kiss the foot of Michelangelo's *Pietà*, crumbling to bits from so much kissing.

'I would prefer to kiss the wounds of Saint Francis. At least he loved animals.'

An old man offers them a lift in his carriage, which is being pulled by two plumed horses.

'I can take you to visit the catacombs.'

'Mama, would you prefer to be cremated?' asks Leonora, after the visit.

'I don't like to think about death,' replies Maurie.

'Yes, that's best — I won't be there beside you when you die.'

6. THE DEBUTANTE

TO LEONORA, NOW BACK AT HAZELWOOD, the account of the journey as delivered by Maurie to Harold seems as interminable as the Venetian canals.

She attempts to persuade her mother to allow her to study art in London.

'A silly and pointless fancy. You should await your future at home.'

'Await?'

'There's nothing wrong with painting,' she tells her, 'After all, I paint the boxes for my charity sales. Your own Aunt Edgeworth wrote novels and was a friend of Sir Walter Scott, but she would never have dreamed of calling herself an "artist", it would have been poorly regarded. Artists are immoral, form illicit unions and are obliged to inhabit attics. You would never get used to living in servants' quarters after leading the life that you have. Now you dance beneath chandeliers; are you really going to go and sweep floors? In any case, what's to prevent you from painting here? Our garden has plenty of nooks where you can go and paint.'

'I want to paint nudes, and I don't see any models here.'

'Why not?' Maurie answers. 'Anyone can take their clothes off and be a model.'

Leonora chews her fingernails. Her only escape is to go riding.

'It is high time you were ready for Buckingham Palace and your presentation at the Court of George V,' her father tells her.

Maurie's diamond tiara is set to grace the head of young Leonora for the occasion.

'I'm not going to wear that crown, it looks ridiculous.'

'Your dress is very beautiful and it will complement the gown perfectly, you need to display the family jewels.'

'It weighs too much and I don't want to wear it. Why don't you buy me a gorilla suit or a donkey hide? I'd go willingly dressed like that.'

Maurie shows signs of irritation. Leonora quivers with rage.

Her father attempts to soothe her: 'You should learn a little gratitude, Leonora. If you were ugly and ungainly, we would not be thinking of presenting you at Court.'

'If only I were!'

'You don't know what you're talking about.'

'Put a paper bag on my head and I'll go to the Palace like that. All I want to do is to paint.'

'Leonora, they'll only regard you as a woman, not as the artist

you purport to be. That really doesn't count at all.'

'And what I want to be doesn't count for anything, Papa?' Leonora demands of her father. Harold Carrington exudes authority.

'If I were a hyena, would I have to go to the ball?'

'Even if you were, I would still present you at Court,' says her father, closing the conversation.

'I wish I could turn into a hyena. Then I could growl, salivate, change sex and laugh aloud right in front of the Queen as a hyena would.'

Being presented at Court is an honour, a public confirmation of high birth, a certificate of the purity of one's bloodline, a sign of belonging to the elite. Young women lean on their family trees; few bear the weight. Relatives are carefully screened and rules of admission are rigorously strict. An invitation to the Palace is an important milestone in life.

The debutantes await the arrival of the King, the Queen and the princes at the foot of the dais, standing at ground level. Above them, the entire Court looks down on them with firm benevolence. The moment the King and Queen make their entrance, all the debs in the full flower of their youth bend double in a deep bow, rehearsed days in advance. There was to be no chance of a fat young lady, fan in hand, crashing to the floor like a giant cauliflower.

As each name is called, a debutante mounts the dais. Dressed like her mother in white satin, albeit a few stone lighter, Leonora rises, closes her fan, and walks towards the podium, performs a reverentially deep curtsey to the King, another only slightly less so to the Queen, and yet another more fleetingly to the rest of the Court. She returns to her seat with her head held high, although the tiara weighs heavily upon it. She feels a steely stare scorching the back of her neck, and turns her head to see her father sitting behind her.

'So much preparation just for this, Mama?'

Waiters, with the Hapsburg jaw of Spanish grandees, serve them beneath a white marquee.

'What do you mean? Don't you realise you have just been presented to the royal family at Court?'

'The sandwiches are second-rate.'

'Your attitude is appalling. I had intended to give you the tiara, but you might as well forget about that now. What you have just now lived through is an historic moment in your life and in ours. The King and Queen are your monarchs, there for your protection: this is your country, your nation and history.'

Her parents offer her a debutantes' ball at the Ritz, for which the many dances she had attended in Paris had prepared her: those of the Count Etienne de Beaumont, of the Countess Greffühle, the

Rothschilds, the Polignacs, the Viscount Charles de Noailles, who hangs paintings by Goya and Titian in his ballroom, which also functions as a theatre. The crystal candelabra tinkle their gold leaves as if they were alive, and every time a new guest arrives, he or she would be announced from the head of the staircase: '*Lord.*' '*Duchess.*' '*Lady.*' '*Marquess.*' '*Count.*' '*Earl.*' '*Prince.*' '*Baroness.*'

All eyes pursue the new arrival making her entrance. Nothing could weigh more heavily than those stares.

'I want to be a hyena,' Leonora says, flinging her clothes on the bed as soon as she returns home from the ball.

'Not that again? Did you have a good time?'

'Ugh! On top of turning up, you want me to enjoy myself there? The male guests are obsessed with nothing except protocol, and the women with nothing except who has on the most ostentatious dress.'

Her mother regards her tearfully:

'At least I was happy, you were the most beautiful one there, as all my friends confirmed.'

'Your friends?'

'Well, my acquaintances. I don't understand why you always need to contradict whatever I say, nor why you have to dismiss every opinion I hold dear.'

After her debut, Leonora is invited to an entire season of balls, all just as mired in protocol. Nobody performs the slightest action beyond those prescribed by the rules of etiquette. Young and desirable females are careful not to laugh or speak too loudly. They do not remove their gloves even to dance. No conversation exceeds the boundaries of discussing the weather, fox-hunting, or the best place to holiday this summer. Cecil Beaton takes Leonora's photograph and her mother dreams of her marrying royalty, whispering to her in French: '*Tu dois faire un grand mariage. Ton père et moi* …' Leonora dislikes her mother addressing her in French, for her pronunciation is execrable.

'You talk French like a Dutch cow, Mama.'

'Show a little more respect, if you please.'

'It's not a lack of respect, it's the truth. And it's also true that you've put on weight.'

Taking tea inside a white marquee in the gardens of Buckingham Palace seems the height of absurdity. Guests perambulate, cup of tea in hand, and introduce one to another. Leonora extends her hand to be kissed, or else gently inclines her head towards one group before passing on to the next. When a young man approaches her to strike up a conversation, she ceases paying attention within a minute and, still smiling like the Mona Lisa, gives him to understand that the space she can accord him on the green lawns at the Garden Party is rapidly dwindling. Not one of those present at the dances and the five o'clock

teas captures her interest. By contrast, she herself attracts every gaze, followed up by the murmur that she is not only beautiful but wealthy. 'What a catch!' 'Have you noticed how she walks, she looks, how disdainful she is?' 'She's frighteningly beautiful, and totally unapproachable!'

Maurie busies herself with managing her daughter's wardrobe, rushing her to the hotel to change three times a day. Leonora has hardly enough time to remove her morning outfit and replace it with her afternoon wear before she has to return and garb herself in the evening dress spread out on her bed beside her dancing shoes. Impossible to wear the same garment twice: no debutante would commit such a faux pas. Still less could she put on her three strings of pearls or the signet ring *chevalière* with the family escutcheon upon it again! Maurie lets her know the expense of such a *trousseau*, of how exemplary and generous a father Harold Carrington is. Leonora thinks just the opposite. 'My father scares me and when he doesn't scare me, he bores me.' Among all her attire, her favourite is the well-cut suit she wears to the Ascot races; its blue-grey colour reminds her of clouds just before the rain. A silk blouse complements it well, as its high collar doesn't get crumpled and always looks good on her. Nonetheless, Leonora continues to defy her mother: 'I don't enjoy dressing up. What I enjoy is undressing.'

Leonora, the distinguished guest, has her own chair in the royal box at Ascot.

'I want to place a bet.'

'You cannot. Up there in the royal box, you're right on public view, if you get up — or make any move — everyone will notice. Have you not observed that the royals never sneeze?'

'Then I want to go to the paddock and take a look at the horses.'

'That will not be permitted. If you have been invited to the royal box, it is because you have demonstrated that you know how to conduct yourself.'

'Then, Mama, why have they invited me at all if I can never do anything?'

Leonora brings a book with her to the follow-up invitation to the royal box. The duke, a princess. When a count asks her: 'What are you reading?' the answer comes back: '*Eyeless in Gaza* by Aldous Huxley.' She does not raise her eyes from its pages, which she continues turning while no-one dares to interrupt this strange creature who in some way appears to despise them. In the box, nobody is aware that Huxley is the author of *Brave New World*.

'Did you have a good time?' Maurie asks her.

'I've nearly finished my book.'

'There's no dealing with you, you do it simply to annoy us.'

Leonora persists in the process of her mother's mortification. Now Maurie really does believe that Harold is right when he tells her: 'You have an impossible daughter.' Sadly disappointed, Maurie no longer wishes to be her friend, for Leonora has betrayed them both.

In society families there persists a custom of informing each child which jewels they will inherit.

'You were going to receive the emerald ring but your deplorable behaviour has now forfeited the chance of inheriting it.'

Back at Hazelwood, her mother shuts herself away in her rooms and her father refuses to speak to her at table. What a disaster! Leonora goes riding with the son of Sir John Taylor, the owner of a neighbouring castle, the family lawyer and a close friend of Harold Carrington, quite as rich as he, intelligent and powerful as he is. The Carringtons think: 'At least a wedding to him would save us from yet further disappointment.'

'A great many young men would have proposed marriage to you if you would only have let them anywhere near you. I saw them and heard what they were saying, people told me as much; but you threw it all away,' Maurie complains to her.

'I don't have the faintest intention of letting you sell me to the highest bidder, nor do I wish to enter the marriage market. What I want to do is enrol at an art school.'

'Those who dedicate their lives to art are either poor or homosexual. No child of mine could be so foolish as to think that painting could serve any useful purpose.' Harold seems to have recovered the use of his voice.

'Papa, this is about something deep inside me, something stronger than I am, something that I know I can't betray,' Leonora stares at him in desperation.

Her father attempts to mollify her:

'Before getting married to Cedric Taylor, you could devote yourself to training the fox terriers and keep your painting for your spare time.'

'Marry Cedric Taylor? Training the fox terriers? Why ever would I?'

'Because you love animals and it is something you can get involved in, without running into problems.'

'But I don't love Cedric Taylor, Papa.'

'You go out riding with him.'

'That's not the same thing at all.'

'He is an outstanding candidate. You really have no idea what's good for you.' Leonora is disturbed by the sharpness of her father's stare. 'You are my daughter.'

He starts every sentence with *you are my daughter*. He emphasises

the *my*. Leonora belongs to him, she is the apple of his eye, and yet he can't manage to hold on to her.

'Papa, don't take away what matters most to me.'

'Oh no? And what would that be?'

'Painting.'

After every battle with her father, Leonora seethes with rage. This time she writes: 'The only person who was there at my birth was our beloved, loyal and old fox terrier *Boozy*, along with a machine for sterilising cows.' She does not come downstairs to eat until her father knocks at the door of her bedroom:

'What are you doing?'

'I am adding the next chapters to my manual of disobedience.'

7. MAX ERNST

HIS DAUGHTER'S RESPONSE AMUSES Harold Carrington. She challenges everything and everyone, including him. A man more accustomed to uncertain vacillation by way of reaction, he is always surprised that his daughter seems completely undaunted by him.

'If you go off to London, I won't give you a penny piece.'

Leonora is admitted to the Chelsea School of Art. She walks along the Thames, a river which is simultaneously spirited and noble. She too is a river: she has the force of one. She explores South Kensington all over again, and smiles at the memory of her former forays around it in a limousine. After attending Court and visiting the royal box, she has gone to live in a basement where she has scarcely enough on which to feed herself. Under orders from Harold Carrington, an employee of Imperial Chemical teaches her how to drive the Fiat her father has bought her. They make excursions to the countryside of an evening, and its gentle slopes are so smooth that Leonora thinks it good to be British.

It is always well worth living in South Kensington, despite having to subsist on a diet of eggs fried on the little gas hob. Serge Chermayeff — also looking out for her on her father's orders — takes her to visit the academy of the French artist Amédée Ozenfant who, together with Le Corbusier, founded the movement known as Purism. With a great curiosity and self-assurance, the maestro studies her from top to toe. 'From now on, you'll be learning how to work,' he pronounces in dry tones and a French accent, before seating her on a bench in a circle of students, each one facing their own easel.

'No charcoal allowed! And no red chalk! Pencil, nothing except lead pencil!'

Leonora obeys him as she has never obeyed anyone before. He teaches her to draw an apple with a single line. If it doesn't come out right, she has to repeat the exercise over and over again sitting in front of one blank sheet of paper after another, and in front of the same apple gradually rotting away before her eyes. Ozenfant never humiliates her, or makes fun of her ambitions. Serge Chermayeff lets Carrington know that his daughter has not missed a single class, and definitely has talent. The maestro has succeeded in taming her — and with excellent results. He has no idea that out of his sight and in her own room, the heiress of Imperial Chemical draws very different subjects to the rotting apple he obliges her to reproduce again and again. He is equally unaware that Leonora is romantically involved with an Egyptian who has a singularly prominent nose. 'Such a pity I never went to Cairo when I travelled with my mother, we would have

had so much in common!'

In her basement, she paints what surges forth from her imagination. She only shows the results to Ursula Goldfinger, the friend who meets her at the end of class each day.

'So your husband is Hungarian?' Leonora enquires.

'Yes, and a great architect. You should meet him.'

Another friend, Stella Snead, amplifies by way of explanation: 'You did know, didn't you, that Ursula is the heiress to Crosse & Blackwell, the soup and condiments manufacturer, and she can afford to buy whatever she wants?'

What an effect money can have! Ursula, tall and strong, treats Leonora with affection because she is so unconventional and direct in her criticisms. During lessons she listens to their classmates with a gentle irony, and reports to Ursula: 'Blessed is he who expects nothing for he will not be disappointed.' Stella is inconstant, while in contrast Leonora never misses a class, and never once baulks at the discipline imposed. Ozenfant demands they all know the essentials of painting: what a pencil or a tube of paint or oils are made of. He obliges them to buy pencils as hard as steel and to paint free-hand, repeating the action until their nerves are frayed. Only once does Leonora dare to speak out:

'The apple has gone rotten.'

'Then do it from memory the way it was before,' he commands.

At the top of a page, Leonora sketches the face of a woman, her line never trembles and is pure in its clarity. Leonora had never seen another woman naked, peeled of her everyday shell, but she achieves the outline at her first attempt. Leonora has none of the training in anatomy that the rest of the class has, but her drawing lives, in sharp contrast to Ursula's, and even more to Stella Snead's. Ozenfant congratulates her.

One afternoon, the maestro informs them that the model hasn't arrived and that one of his female disciples should offer to pose. The one who does is so thin that she looks like a mass of hollows, and you have to seek out her eyes at the bottom of an abyss.

The next time the same situation arises, Leonora volunteers.

'Don't do it,' Ursula advises her. 'Do you know what he asked the last one who offered? He asked her "What do you think you are, a spider?"'

The maestro can be cruel.

'Your work is worthless, and you're not taking it seriously. If there's no rapid improvement, you cannot possibly continue on the course. I'll give you a week.'

Leonora comes across a young man copying a Whistler in the Tate Gallery. He paints as if his life depended on it, and his fervour

illuminates the gallery. Leonora enjoys her encounters with him and a day when they don't meet comes to seem like a day with something missing.

Ursula tells her that in other workshops, students are obliged to draw *The Oracle of Delphi, Apollo* or *The Venus de Milo*, subjects that bore her to such a degree that the pencil falls from her fingers.

On emerging from class with Stella or with Ursula, Leonora uses her savings to buy books on alchemy from second-hand bookstalls.

'Alchemy,' the aged bookseller informs her, 'is a means to achieve total knowledge and leads to liberation.'

'That is exactly what I am seeking: liberation. But I also want to transform my father.'

'Your father will annihilate you.'

Leonora purchases a little amber-coloured bottle with the power to transform individuals, causing them to be reborn, while at the same time mitigating panic attacks.

'That's exactly what I most want. For Harold to be reborn.'

Leonora transforms her liberty into a life force.

'Mama, the freer I feel, the better I paint. I am continually making progress, thanks to this immense force I know I have within me.'

Maurie listens to her daughter with interest, for she too believes that some of the doors of perception still remain closed, and that philtres and charms hold the keys to unlock them. She gives Leonora a copy of Herbert Read's *Surrealism*. On the cover there is a reproduction of a painting by Max Ernst, *Two Children Threatened by a Nightingale*. On seeing it, Leonora feels a flame ignite deep within her. Her emotions are so visceral that she tells her mother:

'You'll never know the gift you have given me. One day I shall be able to see the world just as Ernst has painted it.'

Why is she so different to everyone else? What occurred at her birth to make her turn out like this? How come she always fabricates one problem after another? All the same, there is something admirable lodged deep within her, something of which Maurie has intimations without being able to define precisely what is there.

Leonora confides her passion for *Two Children Threatened by a Nightingale* to Ursula, how it has a life of its own, its actuality underlined by a little door and a window grille, made of wood, that protrude from the painting of a nightingale from which the two terrified children are striving to escape. How can a tiny bird be a threat? She too feels persecuted by what is incomprehensible, by what only the *sidhes* understand, and what now this artist has also discovered. Was Carrington the nightingale who persecuted her and Gerard? Is a bird capable of attacking her and bloodying her canvas? Can evil reside in this minute red thing fluttering against a painted

sky?

'This artist interests me enormously, Ursula.'

'Excellent. My husband is a friend of his! We'll hold a dinner party, invite some notable people along, and I promise you can come and get to know him.'

All at once, Ursula decides to show her Ernst's collages: newspaper cut-outs glued together with illustrations from yellowing magazines, things that no-one had previously dreamt of being of significance, in which everything comes endowed with value. Young virgins or old women about to be tortured, their breasts exposed to view, smiling at their executioners, men with the faces of rabbits or dogs or cockerels, or most frequently of a lion, embracing widows and animals in smart suits, creatures who would never be seen together in daily life. The same follows for plants and insects: a woman as a gardenia, a man as an elephant. Everything moves with a hallucinogenic quality. Ferocious and sarcastic, Max Ernst scandalises his viewers. Dürer, Blake and Goya must be turning in their graves to see themselves depicted suckling the Lion of Belfort, his snout buried in the breasts of a hetera, an upmarket prostitute. Max has converted men into murderers, nocturnal bandits, carrion crows, and into priests: unclean animals who violate women. A new and hitherto invisible reality emerges from the surface of his painting, to be explored by his eagle eye.

Why does this German artist have no respect for them? What harm did they do him, for him to shoot them down in flames in the weekly editions of *Une semaine de bonté? La femme 100 têtes* consists in little scraps of papery nonsense which he cuts and arranges to form a profoundly perverse and malevolent whole; nudity would be less lascivious than tight-fitting corsets from which a breast is about to escape. Unveiled women proffer their backsides to a decorated military general, an archbishop, a dandy, to the Sphinx. Max Ernst, king of all the birds, still carries within him a Sleeping Beauty, a Red Queen.

'So everything can be art, can it?'

'No, not everything,' replies Ursula. 'Max's art is a real find. As you can see, the least offensive of his prints is this one of a woman riding the waves on her bed. It is a poem made visual. Would you like to sleep on the sea?'

'It looks like the work of a diabolical child … The idea of anyone but Nanny watching me sleep terrifies me …'

'The work of art of his that has caused the most scandal is that of the Virgin breast-feeding the Infant Jesus in the presence of three witnesses: André Breton, Paul Eluard and Max himself. Any ordinary person seeing it for the first time will feel hit between the eyes, and it

goes beyond that and confronts the Surrealists themselves.'

'André Breton looks like a wild animal …'

'Yes, he is the lion in all his collages.'

'What does Ernst want to tell us?'

'His creations are an anti-art, he is rounding on his masters …'

Max Ernst appropriates from the works of the past and profanes them; inside his mind they become outrageous, he over-paints classical images and in so doing violates them; he exploits them to fire his own inventiveness. Despite her fears, Leonora is enthused; there's something about Max's collages that takes her out of herself, and his cruelty terrifies her. He never requests permission, but appropriates, smudges and cuts, mutilates and muddies. Everything is his to do as he wants with. According to Ursula, he once declared: 'The Venus de Milo has to be torn down from her pedestal.' He then puts the pieces back together again as if reassembling a chicken before serving up its dismembered parts for dinner.

'The truth is that I have never dared to search my unconscious for what he has found in his. I hide many images away deep inside me so they won't discover me. The most I have managed to give Ozenfant is the head of a grackle bird but what Ernst gets up to astounds me. Next to him the seven-headed beast of the Apocalypse is a turtle dove. Oh Ursula! I feel surrounded by madness, and I don't know how to shut the door on it.'

'You can never close the door, don't act as if you don't know as much. It all goes back to the First World War and the imbecility of the powerful. Dadadadadadada.'

'What's up with you, Ursula?'

'I'm imitating the repeat shot of artillery fire or the speeches of the heads of state. In 1920, Jean Arp — a friend of Max's — joined the conspiracy of those revolted by the war and mounted the first International Dadaist Exhibition in a Cologne urinal. The Dadaists were right: Europe was on the verge of a catastrophe. By nature I am both a subversive and a rebel and you are too. If you don't act according to your instincts, you'll be lost.'

'But I still don't know what I am, all I know is that I love painting more than anything else in the world.'

'We have Freud on hand to guide us as we slough off our skin like snakes.' Ursula places a hand on her shoulder. 'Look, what does this remind you of? I took it from the *Lettres du voyant*. Rimbaud tells us that a poet discovers the occult thanks to a wide, deep and reasoned disordering of our feelings. According to him, a poet needs to seek out every form of love, suffering and madness, to drink to the dregs every kind of poison, in order to conserve their quintessence. Reaching such a point is an indescribable torture, requiring more than superhuman

strength. In the face of all the others, you become the great invalid, the great criminal, the great accursed and the Supreme Sage, before arriving at the great unknown! This can only be achieved by those possessed of a rich soul, one they are willing to cultivate without the fear of going mad.'

'I am filled with fear.'

'Few reach the level of the "unknown". The majority live in fear of losing their heads and going to pieces along the way. Baudelaire also said that we had to go through the fire that burns our brains, and fling ourselves down to the bottom of the abyss.'

Older than Leonora, Ursula has her discover Novalis, talks to her of Apollinaire and recites *Le Pont Mirabeau* aloud. André Breton's *Les Champs Magnétiques* inspired the literature of the Surrealists and Leonora has to read it. Up until this point, Leonora's literary universe has been that of Lewis Carroll, William Blake and the Pre-Raphaelites. Ursula opens the door to the rage of *Les Chants de Maldoror* by Lautréamont, a poet who was born with something of the jackal, the vulture and the panther about him.

'Lautréamont made a comparison that Ernst transformed into his credo: "As beautiful as the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table." Who knows whether you could be his sewing machine, Leonora.'

'Or his umbrella.'

The first International Surrealist Exhibition is held at the New Burlington Galleries, to be attended by Max Ernst. It launches Leonora towards another planet, a place she had conceived as an unrealisable dream during her adolescence. 'So it is that what I have always sought really exists, and what attracts me matters just as much to others.'

She is impressed when Ursula lets her know that at the start of the Spanish Civil War Eluard, Breton and Ernst wanted to travel to Spain to fight alongside the Republicans. Malraux permitted himself the luxury of turning them down, saying: 'I am looking for men who do not know how to paint.'

'They are men who lived through the First World War, when Max was an artillery instructor. He suffered a clinical death and recorded it saying: "Max Ernst died on the 1st August 1914. He resurrected on the 11th November 1918 as a young man desirous of becoming a sage to encounter the legend of his times." Max lived through the war as a dead man. It was one of the greatest evils our world has seen,' Ursula tells her.

'Does Max not believe in God or patriotism?'

'No.'

'I am very proud of my brothers, who have enlisted in the Army, the Royal Navy and the RAF.'

‘For those involved in the fighting, these four years of war continue representing the worst tragedy there could be. Have you read *The Interpretation of Dreams* by Freud? Do you know who Hegel is?’

‘No, Ursula, no.’

‘I’ll bring you their books tomorrow.’

The First World War obliged former Dadaists, now become Surrealists, to acquire the ability to put art at the service of their imagination. In the light of the criminality and the imbecility of the military, followers of Breton and Freud ruled out reason and opened themselves to the high world of the unconscious. They rescued and rehabilitated Lautréamont from oblivion, a consequence of his odes to murder, violence, sadomasochism, blasphemy and darkness. Surrealism, if it was to be permanent revolution, had to start with oneself. Poetry would be made flesh and blood as Eluard demanded. Men and women, the old and the newborn would now be impelled by their feelings to destroy the army, prisons, brothels and, first of all, churches. At long last, painters really did hold the answer, along with writers, and scientists, experimentalists and the inspired, the romantics and muses who guided the creators, those who fearlessly go naked and children who leap into the void holding tight to their umbrellas.

Ah — and the sad youths leaving on the train!

Just one more sausage dog lost between Brühl and Paris.

8. THE NIGHTINGALE'S THREAT

DINING WITH MAX ERNST at home with Ursula and her Hungarian husband Ernő Goldfinger becomes an obsession. Leonora selects a black dress. Her hair, as jet-black as her eyes, cascades over her shoulders. The house is filled with people when she walks through the front door, exchanging her flat shoes for high heels. She deposits the flatties in the hall along with her mackintosh and umbrella, and enters the living room with her heart pumping fit to burst.

Leonora is quite different to the rest of the young guests. She is already pawing the ground, spurring herself onwards, champing at the bit, her eyes flashing. Her lips part in a smile without her intending it. Her mouth is blood red.

'Leonora, Leonora, I want you to meet the photographer Lee Miller, she's a golden Venus, an American model; you can see her over there, at the back, to the right of the living room.' Ursula points in her direction.

Among the groups engaged in conversation, Leonora spies a man with white hair who breaks all the rules of good manners by signalling to her, oblivious to all those pressing in around him. A stranger to convention, he eschews the art critics and possible buyers. 'I see here a free man, a man to whom the business of art is an irrelevance,' Leonora thinks, while at the same instant a waiter offers her a flute of champagne. The bubbles are on the point of overflowing when a sign from a stranger restrains her: Max Ernst is cautioning her with a warning gesture. Ursula introduces her with: 'This is my dear friend and colleague …' The artist isn't listening. He only has eyes for Leonora, his all is directed towards the one person he desires to draw nearer. In no time, Ursula has withdrawn and left the two of them alone.

Leonora meanders about the room, her red mouth bright below her black eyes, her red mouth accentuated by the white of her face and crowned by the wild blackness of her hair. 'How beautiful!' Max thinks. And how very different to the women he is accustomed to seducing and above all, how different to Marie-Berthe, his wife! Ernst turns his back on the art critic and the admiring lady, and takes Leonora by the arm. She has a presentiment that she is running the biggest risk of her life. Magnetic powers seize her like they did Alice when she fell down the tunnel to the centre of the earth.

'Is it true that in London art doesn't exist, compared to what's going on in Paris?' Clearly, he wishes to extend an invitation.

A giraffe sporting an emerald necklace passes by, talking to a rhinoceros: 'That man is irresistible, look he's all eyes.' He surprises

her by taking her by the hand. Leonora has never dreamt of anything like this. She has achieved her goal in life: he will transform her life, teach her to see the world anew. She is his coal mine and he will extract and polish the diamonds from deep within.

Max radiates light.

They isolate themselves in a corner of the room.

'Are you a nightingale?'

'I emerged from the egg my mother laid in her eagle's nest on the 2nd April, forty-six years ago.' He laughs. 'And this took place in Brühl, near Cologne. It was there that eleven thousand virgins gave up their lives rather than lose their virginity. Are you a virgin?'

Leonora is unperturbed. So the genius is twenty-six years older than she? Between 1891 and 1917 lies a gulf of years almost as wide as that between herself and her father. Max tells her the dome of Cologne Cathedral retains the skulls and bones of the Three Wise Men, Gaspar, Melchior and Balthasar, and that every year they take them out in golden coffers encrusted with jewels — something that he, as a child, adored to watch.

'Where on earth did Ursula find you? I dreamt you way back when the Virgin smacked the Infant Jesus' little bottom. You were peeping out from behind the door, and to reach you I had to escape from the house, barefoot and in a red smock, golden curls, blue eyes and a whip in my left hand. I took the road leading to the station, and elicited the admiration of some Catholic worshippers on pilgrimage to Kevelaer. "He is the Son of God," they said, kneeling before me. I offered them my blessings and some neighbours took me home. My father punished me, despite my attempts to explain to him: "I am the Christ Child." So he painted me standing on a little cloud and, instead of a whip, put a crucifix in my hand.'

The following days are devoted to Max. In him, Leonora discovers an artisan, a carpenter, a plasterer, an electrician, a plumber. Compass, hammer, file, any tool whatsoever, pliers, blow-torches, moulds, all matter much more to him than so-called *objets d'art*. Ernst constructs, glues, nails, makes little boxes, opens drawers and doors, builds, refines and incorporates. More than inhabiting an *atelier*, he accommodates an entire ironmongery. As a result, before simply mixing blue and green paint on his palette, he imports screws and cables. The essence of his creativity is his handiwork. His hands, as dextrous as any cabinet maker's, naturally incline towards saw and sandpaper. Screwdriver and pliers are more in evidence than paintbrushes. His spatula is heavy enough to resemble a builder's. And he prefers to talk to a plumber than to a fellow painter, who makes assumptions about his creativity.

'You know, Leonora, my father was also a painter, a bad one, as

all he painted were copies. He taught the deaf how to speak; I would accompany him, and follow the movements of his lips so closely that I learnt how to become such a technical expert that I am now the most observant of men, knowing exactly how to read not only lips, but evil intentions. I also know how raw materials are going to behave, and I read not merely the human face but the surfaces of plaster, chalk, wood, tincture of iodine, coal and oils.'

That night, on returning to her room, Leonora repeats to herself: 'I am happy, I am me. What I've always held on to inside me at long last will be liberated and gallop forth.'

The British art collector, Roland Penrose, invites Herbert Read, author of the book on Surrealism that turned Leonora's head, Man Ray and his lover, the dancer Ady Fidelin, Paul and Nush Eluard, Eileen Agar and her husband Joseph Bard, E. L. T. Messens, Magritte's great friend and the editor of the *London Bulletin*, to Lamb Creek House, his holiday home in Cornwall.

'Why don't you invite your little friend along?' proposes Penrose.

'I think I shall die of love,' Leonora confides to Ursula Goldfinger.

'If you don't die, from now onwards your life will begin to make sense.'

'That girl of yours is brilliant. Where on earth did you find her?' Penrose persists, idolising Max still further.

Leonora is the centre of attraction, the novelty in the group, the big discovery. At night, Ady Fidelin, Penrose's wife, Lee Miller, Eluard's wife, Nush, and Eileen Agar dance naked in the light of their lovers' car headlamps that illuminate the garden. Ady Fidelin's hip movements prove superior to those of Nush. 'Indecent, pornographic,' the newspapers accuse Max. The order for his arrest was not long in coming.

'What about you? Are you just going to stand and stare at us?' asks Ady. In a flash, Leonora has stripped naked. What freedom! Lee Miller assures her: 'Madness opens the doors on your inner world. Performing acts condemned by others raises you to a new level, you leap out of your own mediocrity.'

The nocturnal dance is an act of redemption. Leonora is exalted, believes in herself, in the beauty of her body, she is a mare set at liberty within her animal hide; seeing her now, the Reverend Mother would bear witness to her capacity to levitate. During the daytime, she walks everywhere at Max's side as part of an ongoing apprenticeship, while he collects leaves and bark from the trees, places them under a sheet of paper, traces them with a pencil and teaches her the technique of *frottage*.

'I discovered how to do it one day, having carefully studied a plank of wood flooring, then placed a sheet of paper on top of it,

rubbing it with a pencil until the grain of wood turned into the surface of the sea. I found knots in the wood and wanted to conserve what the wood showed me, its landscapes, its dearly cherished poetry, its sexuality.'

Leonora looks at him. He is a man possessed and she longs to hurl herself into the abyss with him. Whatever nobody else notices, to Ernst is creative material. He might well be mentally ill, but he draws her to him, and she can no longer draw back. In his *frottage* she can see a forest, birds and hybrid animals never previously imagined. All now transformed into memorable objects.

'I had no idea that matter could contain so many unrecognisable spirits.'

'I know a great deal about trees, because when I was in Brühl my father went into the forest to paint and took me with him.'

Max hoards what nobody else notices, his field of study includes a length of rope fibre, a piece of cork, a wooden peg, a hair forgotten in the sink. 'You have to go beyond painting.'

He introduces her to one of the works he gave to Roland Penrose:

'It's an oil painting, can you see how thick it is, see every corpuscle it contains? I mixed the paint in with the hairs from my arm. I made up a paste, applied it to the canvas and then rubbed it for hours with sandpaper. Other colours and then other textures emerged, and look how it came out. Now we are going to rub this canvas I have just painted, until its entrails are exposed, new pigments, its deepest veins. It will reveal everything it contains within, and you'll discover how many things lie beneath what you saw at first sight. What happens to the viewer when images are superimposed is simply astounding. Look how this fragment of linen fabric unravels, can you follow the trail of each thread? Now cross it over the next one. Anything serves a purpose: you can use a spatula or even a knife, *grattage* means that the marks of time emerge like hieroglyphics, even like cries.

'It looks to me as if you are violating the fabric.'

'That's the convulsive beauty Breton talks about.'

Leonora is dazzled as she follows the maestro, she's swinging on high tension cables, unpicking the weft of her life.

'Everything that lives has its way of being, and it's not true that painting is no more than the application of colour to canvas. That kind of painting is finished, what counts is what goes way beyond it. You can smear it with your excrement, scratch it — go for it! — don't sit around copying the masters as you'll never be able to supersede them. The life in your body, in the composition of its very cells, is what composes your painting, Leonora. You can brush the canvas like your hair, scratch it with your nails or your teeth, stain it with your blood

or your saliva, salt it with your tears.'

Frottage also reveals to Leonora the seven circles of hell. She descends to new strata inside the mine. Max shows her a forest constructed out of fish bones.

'How?'

'I removed the fish skeleton, let it fall on the canvas, and transformed it into a forest.'

Leonora murmurs admiringly: 'You teach me to see what I have never seen before. The potential was there, that I knew, I could feel it. Thanks to you, I am now certain of it!'

Ernst gives her a sheet of paper and a stick of charcoal, then sets her to trace the rough surface of a plank. Soon she becomes excited.

'Now, add your own colours to it, and your forest will be just like mine.'

When Leonora shows him what she has drawn on top of her tracing, he exclaims:

'Don't be so orthodox, don't seek to obey, free yourself, unearth your past. What did you dream last night?'

'The impossible.'

'Then draw the impossible.'

'I dreamt there was a whale at the far end of my bedroom, and I was also a whale, and we were going to eat me.'

'That's a familiar image that goes all the way back to the Bible. Jonah was more creative with it. You were really going to eat yourself?'

'Assisted by you and the depth of your mouth.'

Ernst smears a leaf with paint and places a second leaf on top of it, then lifts the top one off and from beneath emerge cypresses, poplars, mosses, birds; they transmute into hybrid creatures in which skin, fur and feathers are indistinguishable. Ernst gives it the title *Woman Turning into a Bird.*

They spend two weeks living under the same spell. Among the women, the photographer Lee Miller is the person who most attracts Leonora.

'I was Man Ray's assistant. He also caused me to fall in love with him, and I took portraits of Picasso, Eluard and Jean Cocteau. I was the statue in Jean Cocteau's *Blood of a Poet* and the theatre critics agreed that mine was the best part in the whole film!'

It's a fact that she has a model's figure. 'Did you know that Lee Miller did the adverts for Kotex sanitary towels?' gossips Eileen Agar. Leonora is surprised to learn that her new women friends should have a life so rich in challenges.

'I've lived nothing and know nothing,' she tells Lee Miller.

'It's better that way, and you'll please Max better too. He's a

Pygmalion.'

Eileen Agar, the Argentine, dazzles her with her audacity. Her daring is way in excess of that of the English girls up in Lancashire. She follows the sun like a sunflower; Leonora wants to be like these women, living deliberately open to magnetic currents. They talk of their lovers and boast of their nocturnal exploits and extol their emotions. These women certainly know how to live! Lee Miller grew bored in Egypt with her millionaire Aziz Eloui Bey and sent him packing, pyramids and all. She made him a long tie of the Nile and left him with his tongue hanging out on the river bank.

'I arrived on a camel made of sand,' she assures Leonora, who listens to her open-mouthed. Eileen Agar is capable of changing a quill into a spray of roses. The aim of life is not to prosper, but to transform oneself.

When you launch yourself into the unknown is when you are saved.

'How do you manage to paint?' Leonora asks Eileen Agar.

'The first thing is to be receptive, and you are. Sometimes I just sit still for a quarter of an hour or more, asking myself what I am going to do, and all of a sudden an idea comes to me. Often it is nothing more than a title, a caption, or the germ of an image. I smear the canvas, giving form to my unconscious mind. If I get stuck, I take a little nap, and when I return to my easel, the idea flows again. I try not to be too alert, since being over-conscious is inhibiting.'

Just one thing dampens the passion of their surroundings. The Spanish Civil War, which Picasso indicts with his painting of *Guernica*, now on exhibition in Paris. In the house in Cornwall, the mural evokes more comment than the war itself.

'I loathe men when they dress up as soldiers,' says Eileen Agar, 'I loathe weapons, I loathe war.'

'I can't return to Paris without your promise that you'll come too, Leonora.'

'What for?'

'To live with me, paint with me, and die with me,' says Max, by way of a farewell.

'Now that I have met you, how can you imagine that I would leave you?'

'Max, you are my Holy Grail.'

'Max, you are my misfortune.'

'You are my spoon.'

Ursula Goldfinger warns her:

'Think it over carefully. He is married to a woman who is a gallery director in Paris. She is extremely well known, all the painters there owe her a great deal, she protects and even maintains some of

them.'

'Then she should be giving him a kick up the backside right now this very minute.'

Leonora thinks leaving a wife seems as simple as choosing another menu. Meat or fish? For Leonora, leaving everything behind is the easiest thing in the world, given how willing she was to send her parents, her brothers, Nanny and Boozy — her fox terrier — to the devil in both England and Ireland.

'So you are set on doing exactly whatever you want,' Nanny says, with a sad look in her eyes.

'Of course,' Leonora answers back, capable of surrendering herself without question and without thought for the consequences.

Back in Hazelwood, Leonora confronts her parents. Not only is she not about to have the wedding they have so longed for, it couldn't even happen with the man she is madly in love with, since he is already married. And he is twenty-six years older than her, and she is on the point of being reunited with him in Paris.

'Quite different structures underpin our sense of reality, Papa. Just like in painting: when you make a tracing a different image emerges. It's called *pentimento*.'

'What are you talking about, Leonora?'

'I am searching for another way to live.'

'Your way of life is conditioned by your birth, by the education we have given you, and by your inheritance. If you behave with ingratitude, you'll pay dearly for it.'

'No. Papa, I have learnt other ways of living in the world. I am not your creation. I want to reinvent my own self. I am leaving.'

Outdoors, her father's foxhounds are barking, but with less fury than the pack baying inside Leonora herself.

The farewell is a declaration of war. How is it possible that he, the builder of a business worth millions of pounds, is being defied by a young girl? How will he get someone so ungrateful to submit to his control?

From the heights of his rage, Carrington yells at her from the bottom of his guts: 'You are no longer my daughter! My door will never be darkened by your shadow again!' Leaning on Maurie for support, he prophesies: 'You shall never see me again!'

As Leonora rushes out to the station, intending to catch the train to Dover and from there the ferry to Calais, her mother catches hold of her: 'Let me know as soon as you get to Paris. Whatever situation you find yourself in, I will always help you. What you're doing is sheer madness, and you have no idea what may await you there.'

9. LOPLOP

IN 1937 AND AT THE AGE of twenty, Leonora leaves her home never to go back. 'I never left with Max. I went alone and every time I have ever left anyone, I've left alone.'

No sooner does she arrive in Paris than Mrs. Ernst, to whom Max has been married for ten years, appears, as sharply pointed and inevitable as the Eiffel Tower. She was at the exhibition in London, without Max ever mentioning her.

Impetuously, Leonora convinces herself: 'It doesn't matter to me. Max could have a harem of wives, all immense giants, bra size 42 C, armed to the teeth and determined to kill me; and I would stay with him regardless.' She takes a taxi to his studio at 26, Rue des Plantes, in Montparnasse.

'Whatever happens, I've come to Paris to paint,' Leonora tells herself, and asks her mother to rent a flat for her at 12, Rue Jacob.

She tells Max all about her life. She assures him her father will pursue her even unto Paris and make their live together impossible.

'It doesn't matter if he does,' Ernst replies. Carrington took away her beloved Tartar when she still so needed him.

Max contributes a rocking horse he found in an antiques shop, which Leonora paints alongside a hyena, her other self, in a picture she has begun called *The Inn of the Dawn Horse*. She gives the final brushstrokes to her white trousers and her jet-black hair. Tartar flees through the window towards the freedom of the trees. You have to fly above everything. Life explodes inside Leonora, there's no way back, she gallops as she did on Winkie, sweeping all obstacles from her path. Dragons with long claws and monstrous serpents with boars' snouts can tear at her flesh, but she gallops onwards. Nothing stops her. She is a mare, rearing, kicking up dust-clouds. Nothing restrains her. Her strength dumbfounds the painter, who day and night won't leave her alone, following her closely and nervously; she must not escape him like the horse in her self-portrait.

Now it is her turn to make him feel secure: 'Yes, I am here, Max, like the leaves you make rubbings with, like the bark covering the tree, like the trees of the earth. So time will pass, and my roots will become yours, entwined in one another.'

Ernst's wife, Marie-Berthe Aurenche, protects artists from themselves, praying for them daily. If they don't support her in return, if they go over to Leonora, she will forgive them. She takes refuge in the Church. At the moment of the elevation of the Host, the devout turn their heads and stare at her sobbing loudly beside the holy water stoup, raising her hands to the heavens.

Before going to sleep at night, Leonora runs over the lessons taught by her master. Madness brings the Surrealists to a higher level. Up until now Leonora's world at home in England has been a conventional one, possibly insipid but well protected; in Paris she is walking along the edge of a precipice, hand in hand with the most daring man on Earth.

Any of the Old Masters would have opened their arms to Max. Rembrandt would have had him sit by his side, yet Ernst wants to cut all that up, turn it into collage, paint horns on his [Rembrandt's] head, in order to travel on to the next dimension, break every rule. So much courage is required and Leonora follows him breathlessly, all her senses alerted. Music emanates from Max's body, his voice is pure provocation, his movements grow like ivy intricating itself around her legs.

'The strongest Surrealist image is one that presents the most heightened degree of arbitrariness, and which requires the most work to translate into a practical language.'

'How can I paint a sense of smell? How can I make my paintings reek?'

'Write it down.'

Leonora writes *The Debutante* in order to make a mockery of her presentation at Court. As well as being stinking and repellent, the hyena emits the sound of sarcastic, human laughter. She paints one with the eyes of a man and its breasts swollen with milk.

'Why on earth would they admit a hyena into Buckingham Palace, Leonora?'

'Because she kills the servant, then covers her hyena face with the woman's skin for a mask, and carries on until her stench betrays her. Is it absolutely necessary for you to spend tonight at the Rue des Plantes with your wife?'

'When you know her better, you will see that I am right to do so. She is too fragile, she cries the whole time, my friends all adore her, and many of them owe their careers to her. Jean Aurenche is her brother, and a virtuoso cinematographer. It is difficult to abandon her, I have to proceed very slowly with her.'

'And how fragile do you think *I* am?'

'Next to her, you are the Rock of Gibraltar.'

Ernst divides his days and nights between his studio on the Rue des Plantes and the Rue Jacob.

'To Marie-Berthe, the end of love is like being disembowelled.'

'And for you?'

'I am Loplop, the superior bird, and I am obsessed with you, Leonora.'

'What is Loplop all about?'

‘There’s a street poet known as Ferdinand Lop. I took his name and am the Vogelobre Loplop.’ Max wraps his arms around her. ‘I am a bird of prey, and I shall cover you with my feathers. Look, they are already sprouting.’

The picture that most shocks Leonora is that of the blind swimmer imprisoned behind vertical stripes made not of water but of steel. Or are they electric cables about to electrocute him? Is this the water that exerts such efforts to drown us, the harder we swim? There is no way to escape.

‘Who can save themselves? Are you going to throw yourself into the water with me?’

‘Once I saw a blind swimmer who never for a moment strayed from his lane.’

He explains that the painting is inspired by an illustration of electric currents in a science book, and that ‘automatically, we all blindly follow the current’.

Max’s Surrealist friends swiftly turn her into their idol. Nush Eluard takes her by the hand. ‘Look, I am the wife of a poet and I live every minute as if it were my last.’ Lee Miller assures her that, ‘In this life, everything is permitted if you know how to do it.’ Young and lovely, Leonora has turned her back on a vast fortune and an enviable position in society. She is the absolute incarnation of what Breton calls *l’amour fou*, breaking every rule; her actions belie the bourgeois conventions within which she was raised. Lee Miller agrees: ‘You have come so far already, don’t look back. Marie-Berthe, poor thing, is now a pillar of salt.’

Breton’s followers go to the very limits of their existence, the margins of society, they are seers. They appropriate a truth beyond reality, and call it Surrealism. They demand the liberation of men and women from all that prevents them from being themselves, in order to conform with a biological impulse to do whatever attracts them. Art confined by tradition is like a caged beast. To jail a creature is to deprive it of its grandeur. There is little space for fantasy within the cage of traditional art. However firmly established, inhibitions continue to maintain their force, no matter what liberties men accord themselves.

‘Paris loathes us,’ sighs Louis Aragon, still resentful of the censorship accorded to *Le Con d’Irène* in the creation of which he had to suck all of Apollinaire’s *Eleven Thousand Pricks*.

‘How wonderful,’ replies Breton. ‘He is a great man who justifies our existence. The bourgeoisie hate us because soon they will have to admit that we have an indefinable attraction within ourselves which excites them. In the gallery, the day before yesterday, a woman told me she had returned to view Ernst’s paintings a second time, because

their colour and sense of movement affected her so profoundly.'

Among all the other exhibitors, it is Ernst's spiritual dimension that stands out. He does what he likes and they admire him. Leonora is now his queen, his woman, his chosen one, and Marie-Berthe has been cast aside along the way: she is now nothing more than a victim. Surrealists do not practise fidelity.

Loplop, the superior bird, dazzles André Breton: 'We are witnesses to the birth of a new art form.' Insults justify Ernst's way of life and his disdain for whoever fails to understand it. *La Fessée*, his painting of the Virgin slapping the infant Jesus' bottom, offended his father. He paints with fury, liberating the burdens of childhood, buffeting traditions, taking it out on his family. When he was an adolescent visiting an art gallery in Cologne, he heard a young man offering an explanation of each painting in turn to an old man. Finally, the old man exclaimed indignantly: 'What is all this about? I am now seventy-nine years old, and in my whole life dedicated to art I have never been so insulted.' The youth became equally infuriated: 'If you are really seventy-nine years old, you should have passed on to a better life by now.'

'He would like to be your friend,' Max intervened, speaking to the young man.

'My name is Jean Arp,' the young man introduced himself, holding out his hand. 'Art has to be done away with as civilisation was by the War.'

'How?'

'With terror, with rage.'

'Does Dadaism not have any room for compassion?'

'Yes, but never for the past.'

Arp was the first to affirm that chance is the great creative stimulus. After struggling for months with a picture which he ended up tearing to bits and scattering to the four winds, he observed that the scraps of paper had fallen to the ground in just the shape that he had been seeking. So he stuck them together, recalling Mallarmé: '*Un coup de dés n'abolira jamais le hasard*.'

He tells Max: 'I created a woman's buttocks from an ink blot.'

Ernst despises the morality of the confessional and maintains, with Lautréamont, that his one and only task is to attack the Creator who engendered such scum on earth as man. Max discovered him thanks to Breton, who in turn knew him because Soupault obtained a copy of *Les Chants de Maldoror* ('Songs of Maldoror') which he took to the Front with him during the First World War.

According to Ernst, the Church's confessionals were responsible for diminishing sexuality and repressing pleasure.

Max brandishes the cutting edge of his smile.

All this rebelliousness stimulates Leonora because it evokes something more within her; her energy is more ferocious than ever, and her ideas swim against the current like salmon. The more eccentric Max's propositions become, the more attractive they seem to her.

'Do you know that once upon a time I wanted to be a doctor? My intention was to cure minds. I felt myself to be capable of teaching men not to give in to whatever a scarecrow in a cassock told me about being an emissary of Divine Will. When you're young, you're like a billiard ball, always liable to bounce one end of the table to the other. I experienced mystical crises, times of exaltation and depression, even attacks of hysteria. I dangerously blurred the distinction between birds and humans because my pink cockatoo died the same day my sister was born. I buried her in the garden — the cockatoo not my sister — and then descended into a nervous breakdown; the same experience repeated itself when I was almost hit by a car in Brühl. I laughed and the driver cursed at me. I put my family into check-mate and I think I did them a favour when I left Germany.'

What Max fails to mention is that in Brühl he also left behind his first wife, the art critic Louise Straus, and his son, Hans Ulrich Ernst, known as 'Jimmy', aged only two. The boy came to visit in Paris and Max had no idea what to do with him. He hauled him around his friends' houses to see Dalí, Masson and Tanguy. It was with relief that Max took him back to the Gare St. Lazare and put him on a train back home.

Now Jimmy was living in Paris with his mother, looking for work with the help of Marie-Berthe Aurenche, the woman abandoned. Since the painter had left his second wife, Louise and she had become accomplices in grief.

'Leonora, paint what you used to think about as a child. Express all your inhibitions and your childhood fears.'

'Then I would have to paint like a child and I've no interest in doing that.'

'It's the first step to liberating yourself; whatever you paint, whatever you draw, whatever you sculpt will be childish in content but will lead you into freedom. In addition, children arrive in the world with an impressive power of reason but then, through lack of experience, allow themselves to be repressed by adults.'

One morning Leonora snaps at him: 'Marie-Berthe told me — or rather yelled at me — that you have a son. If you are so very interested in children's fantasies, introduce me to Jimmy.'

'What will you say to him?'

Jimmy is now seventeen and no longer a child. He has nothing in common with the collage his father dedicated to him fifteen years

earlier, when he was about to turn two: *Dadafax, minimus*. He is a young man with straight fair locks that fall into his eyes, and which he keeps pushing aside with his hand. Leonora kisses him on both cheeks and Jimmy smiles.

'The thing I like best in the world is chocolate cake, and I've just baked one. Would you like to taste it, Jimmy?'

Leonora sings and dances, laughs and makes him laugh. Jimmy feels more comfortable with her than with his own father.

'Would you like a glass of beer?'

'I would prefer a glass of wine.'

'*That's my boy,*' replies Leonora, laughing.

'Your son is more open than you are,' Leonora tells Max when he returns.

'To me he is a total stranger,' Max replies.

10. THE SURREALIST WHIRLWIND

LEONORA ASTONISHES HER LOVER with her culinary talents. She brings dishes out of the oven made to her own original recipes, and operates confidently in the kitchen. Their guests likewise get to savour her black eyes, wild dark hair, white arms, slim thighs. Her pronouncements express an innocence and authenticity that make her stand out from the ordinary.

'It's not feasible for her to be as ingenuous as she seems; in her case, ingenuousness can only be a perversion,' claims the Surrealist doctor and great scholar of ancient civilisations, Pierre Mabille.

'She is most certainly a genuine *femme enfant,*' exalts André Breton.

Leonora teases, provokes desire without meaning to, yet is too intelligent to be unaware of what she is doing. Independent-minded and combative, as her expulsion from several schools bore witness, the Surrealists melt before her. Breton, the father of Surrealism, finds her adorable.

'Your beauty and talent have us all mesmerised. You are the very image of the *femme enfant.*'

Leonora is annoyed. 'I am not a *femme enfant*. I happened upon your group through Max, but I don't consider myself a Surrealist. I have had fantastical visions and I paint and write them. I paint and write what I feel, and that's all I am doing now.'

'Say what you will, to me you represent the "child-woman" who, thanks to her own ingenuity, is in direct contact with the unconscious.'

'All this deification of woman is a load of nonsense! I've seen how the Surrealists use women the same as any wife is used. The Surrealists may *call* their women muses, but it's the women who still end up making the beds and cleaning the toilet.'

Her absolute self-confidence and natural impertinence are the consequence of her social class. Leonora had faced down her parents, the nuns, the Queen's own Court; she had absolutely no reason to consider herself inferior. If she allowed herself to feel humiliated, her work would be affected. Nobody recognised the existence of women Surrealists. What in men is regarded as creativity, in women is regarded as madness. The more Leonora contradicts Breton, the more she attracts him.

'I adore your English girl. You may have brought her here, but she has won her own position among us.'

Leonora is a delicately wrapped force of animal nature. When Joan Miró, another of Max's friends, asks her to go and buy some

cigarettes for him, and holds the money out to her, she is enraged: 'You are perfectly capable of going down for your own cigarettes,' and she walks off and leaves him standing with the note in his hand.

She refuses to pose for Man Ray, who is keen to photograph her. Instead, she is more interested in his girlfriend, Ady Fidelin, and cannot understand what she sees in the North American Surrealist. Picasso is a typical Spaniard who believes that any woman will faint at his feet with desire. She meets Salvador Dalí at Breton's house in the Rue Fontaine, and is unmoved by being presented as 'the most important woman artist'.

The Surrealists all have a secret passage leading to happiness inside them. Mockery is their most potent weapon. Their criticisms are implacable and they forgive nobody, not even themselves. Laughter is therapeutic, as every doctor affirms.

Breton is above all attracted by rebelliousness. In others, he looks for the red-and-black flag of anarchism and is elated whenever he finds it flying. Rebelliousness is a moral virtue. Despite her youth, Leonora recognises no limits, all she needs is to shout out her rage in a public square like they do. Max Ernst told her that at heart Breton is a solitary man because one afternoon, when they were playing the Game of Truth, Eluard asked him: 'Do you have friends?' and he responded: 'No, my dear friend.' Breton seeks out live interlocutors in order to confront them. A rain of insults and every kind of projectile, including shoes, end all his public appearances. Jacques Vaché, who died from an opium overdose, remains forever in his memory, and André conceals himself behind him: 'He is my only great friend.' For Vaché, other people's enthusiasms, apart from being noisy, are detestable. When Leonora tells him 'sentimentality is a form of weariness,' she unites him with his memory of Vaché and surrenders to his intelligence.

Leonora meets the illusionist Magritte on two separate occasions, finding him well dressed and withdrawn. There is gossip within the group that his mother's suicide, when he was only thirteen, formed his personality. He saw her when they brought her back out of the Sambre River. 'It's not so much that he paints well,' comments Leonora, 'as that he thinks very well. He told me his only enemies are his bad paintings.'

They say that he covered the faces in *The Lovers* with the white dress of his drowned mother.

Péret and Breton are inseparable. Smaller than Breton and bald, while André's head of hair radiates splendidly, Benjamin follows him into parties and meetings, never acknowledging that he is the more audacious of the two. Twenty years earlier, he was the first to attack the academics, the traditionalists, the famous. He referred to Maurice

Barrès in such slanderous terms that he offended not only the *bien pensants* but even the Dadaists. At Anatole France's funeral, Péret and his friends handed out a leaflet written by Louis Aragon, inviting the mourners to kick the corpse. The press called them 'jackals'. It then occurred to him to turn up at a demonstration wearing a gas mask and Nazi uniform, shouting: 'Long live France and long live French fries!' He had the habit of attending official events with a bag of tomatoes, cabbages and eggs which he hurled with expert aim.

André renounces the hypnosis sessions directed by Benjamin Péret, as they had already turned violent years earlier. It became more and more difficult to rouse René Crevel, who repeatedly attempted and finally succeeded in committing suicide. And Robert Desnos, who pursued Paul Eluard with a knife. It was out of the question for Max and Leonora to agree to hypnosis sessions: 'We are both too cerebral,' he jokes.

Of them all, Leonora feels closest to Breton, who lived through the atrocities of the First World War and then treated patients who had suffered severe clinical depression. His worst side is his intensity, and his desire to control everything. To her, he seems like a good lion, whose mane she enjoys caressing.

Man Ray continues to insist he wants to photograph her and she continues to refuse. Max Ernst warns her: 'He is fierce and could kill you if you don't agree.'

'Let him kill me!'

'André, I think,' Leonora begins, 'that nobody here belongs to my world. Sometimes it makes me happy, but at others I'm afraid of losing my mind.'

'Fear of madness is the last frontier you have to cross. Wounded minds are infinitely superior to sane ones. A mind in torment is creative. Eighteen years ago, on returning from the war with Soupault and Aragon, our minds were preoccupied by the aftermath of battle, and we discovered that automatism in art can be not only healing, but also creative.'

'As for me I was educated in Logic.'

'Me too, and much more than you, because I am both French and a doctor, little Leonora. You are a lot like Nadja — wealthy, arbitrary, and for these reasons, irrational.'

Leonora has no idea who Nadja is. Breton's wife, Jacqueline Lamba, cuts her short.

'He told me, too, that I was his "Nadja" and never introduced me as a painter. And "Nadja" ended up in a mental asylum without him so much as lifting a finger to save her.'

'Say what you like, your husband is a good man.'

'Yes, he is a good man, but the person who runs our home,

receives our friends, empties the ashtrays and sweeps up after them is me.'

At 42 Rue Fontaine, Breton houses a splendid collection of African and Oceanic art, and out of the blue the Cuban artist Wilfredo Lam informs him: 'I too could also be included in your collection.'

'First paint your own totems, your own masks, your own Cuban essence.'

Ernst is in fashion, a man of the world, and his new lover amplifies his cosmopolitanism by being a gorgeous upper-class Englishwoman. Marcel Rochas invites them round and when Leonora asks: 'What shall I wear?' Princess Marie de Gramont answers: 'Child, all you need to wear is your beauty.' Leonora follows her advice to the letter and wraps herself in a sheet. At the high point of the ball, she lets the toga fall and stands naked in front of everyone. They are evicted on the spot.

In Paris, Max launches her into danger, teaching her never to doubt her desires: 'Defy and you will overcome, Leonora. Life is for the audacious.' Leonora tells him the visions she had as a child, and he recommends her to paint the Minotaur, the wild boar, and the horses from her father's stable. Leonora has already been far more courageous than most of the Surrealists. 'You have gone much further than anyone else you see around you here, and everyone knows it,' her lover tells her. She is received with admiration, they want to hear what she has to say, read what she writes, look at what she paints. Max proudly displays her, calls her his beloved of the wind, his mare of the night.

'So you are going to cross the River Lethe with her?' Breton asks, with irony.

'She *is* my Lethe.'

The Surrealists' social life is intense. None of them worry if they sleep all day and stay out all night. The café is the altar at which André Breton officiates. His acolytes approach with reverence. Breton distributes indulgences, then condemns and sentences, attracts and repels. His congregation applauds Dalí's expulsion following the accusation that he flirts with fascism, excuses Catholicism, and has an unlimited passion for money. When he is brought to judgement, Dalí attends with a thermometer in his mouth and a blanket around his shoulders. The courtroom descends into farce.

'I love Gala more than my mother, more than my father, more than Picasso and even more than money,' Dalí proclaims.

It is years since Antonin Artaud distanced himself from the group, yet he remains a target for their insults, the most acidic of which is voiced by Eluard: 'Opportunistic scum.'

At the start, Breton charged Artaud with running the *Bureau des*

Recherches Surréalistes, installing him at 15 Rue de Grenelle. ‘Artaud will pull together his researches better than anyone else because he is a universal genius, even if he never changes his sheets,’ André explained. All went well until, in *La Revolution Surréaliste*, Artaud published a letter insulting Pope Pius XI. Breton praised it. Artaud then published a second open letter, addressed to the Dalai Lama, in which he was invited to levitate, which Breton likewise accepted. A third, directed to the directors of Europe’s mental asylums with the intention of persuading them to liberate all their inmates, incited Breton to close down the *Bureau*.

As so often happens with certain liberators, the authoritarian and explosive Surrealist leader dismissed him.

Artaud travelled to Mexico in search of a truth now lost in Europe, which the Tarahumara people encountered through the peyote plant. In the capital, María Izquierdo and Lola Álvarez Bravo took him in hand, gathering him up in a state of near-fatal starvation and alcoholisation on the pavement of Calle Guadiana, in the district of Cuauhtemoc. On his return to Paris he lived in the most abject poverty, rejected by all. ‘He no longer has any teeth,’ commented Picasso. No-one noticed that Artaud, in discovering the Tarahumara, had brought a new dimension to Surrealism.

Leonora and Max invite Picasso and Marcel Duchamp to their house, the latter reluctant to leave his chess game. Benjamin Péret was inseparable from Breton until a redhead called Remedios appeared in his life and the two men began to see less of each other. ‘It seems as if the Spanish girl is very shy.’ Rue Fontaine was again filled with delusions and deceptions, and new trios formed as they had years earlier with Eluard, Gala and Max, causing Eluard to comment: ‘They have no idea what it means to be married to a Russian. I now prefer him to her.’

The Romanian artist Victor Brauner seeks at all costs to sell the self-portrait in which he appears blind in one eye. From his right socket issues a large teardrop of blood. The painting is the result of a premonition, since a few months later in 1938 and in the midst of an argument, Esteban Francés hurls his glass at Oscar Domínguez, and Victor Brauner loses his eye.

‘Impossible to live at a hundred miles an hour, we are all going to shatter.’

‘I can’t stand this any more, my head feels like Duchamp’s coffee mill,’ they concur. Dora Maar, badly treated by Picasso, causes grief every time she enters a restaurant.

‘Just look how Picasso has left her,’ mutters one waiter to the next.

‘Looking like a Picasso,’ he replies.

Leonor Fini makes a date with Renato Leduc, assistant to the Mexican consul in Paris, at a café in Montparnasse, in order to introduce him to Picasso.

Oscar Domínguez, recently arrived from Tenerife, joins them.

'Oh damn it, give me a lift. I just want to stop by my place to pick something up.'

No sooner have they gone into the house on the Rue Jacob than Domínguez grabs Picasso.

'Maestro, I am a Spanish painter and I am also dying of hunger here.'

'That you're Spanish is obvious even at a distance. As for dying of hunger, that's a phase we have all been through.'

'Look, maestro, the other day I was at some North American's party and he was carrying around 25,000 francs to buy three scribbles by Picasso. I pretended that I owned a work by you.'

He opens the packet to reveal a print of the *Bather with a Ball*. Instead of becoming annoyed, the man from Malaga congratulates him.

'These North Americans don't buy paintings but signatures. Leonora, can you lend me a pen or a pencil?'

He signs it and hands back the print. 'Sell it and earn yourself those 25,000 francs.'

Oscar and Pablo become inseparable. Sometimes Renato Leduc joins them, and all three discuss bullfights together.

André Breton's house also hosts private parties, just as much as at Leonora's, on the Rue Jacob. One night, Breton hushes everyone with the announcement: 'We are all going to listen to Leonora.' Leonora keeps silent. It is impossible to be rebellious to order. Her rebelliousness is sacred and she produces it when she wants, not on command.

'We are your flock of black sheep, and we'll follow wherever you lead.'

Leonora is not only mistress of herself but of all her admirers. What a wonderful life to lead! The only one to get to her is Marie-Berthe Aurenche, who turns up unannounced, bawling loudly at her:

'Why don't you go back to England?'

'Why does she enter without knocking?' Leonora asks her lover.

'Because she has a key.'

'Who gave her a key?'

'Loplop.'

Marie-Berthe follows them to the Café de Flore, where she shouts and makes scenes under the apprehensive gaze of Leonora. She smashes plates, cups and glasses; locals and waiters stare at her motionless, since this is Paris where anything can happen. Like a good

British woman, Leonora understands that emotional storms are not to be displayed, and that exhibitions of jealousy always look pathetic. From infancy onwards she has been taught that 'children should be seen and not heard' and, on the available evidence, what the infantile Marie-Berthe most desires is to cause a public scandal. The Surrealists haughtily pay no attention to women on the downward slope; by contrast, Leonora is a find, the most precious jewel in their crown. Madame Aurenche is in the business of losing her clients. Each confrontation ends in her rout. Whenever she bawls, between sobs, that she longs only to return to the convent, Leonora considers it is probably the correct and indeed only place for her, among all those veiled women who dare not say who they are and who inter themselves alive. It would appear that compassion is not the main suit of the male artist either, for he has not the least patience with the mental collapse of his ex-wife: 'Let her return to the convent from where I first brought her.'

Leonora writes and paints and doesn't worry about what will happen to her.

Peggy Guggenheim, the patron who imposes modern art on the world, buying from Picasso, Dalí, Duchamp, Tanguy, now comes to knock at the door of Ernst's studio. All Paris is talking about her. They recount how she spends one night with Beckett and the next with Tanguy, and how she always picks up the hotel bill. She treats them like her purchases, rating each canvas according to performance, and she never sleeps alone. She is avant-garde, turning up at the studio of her choice, consuming Beckett in a week, and exhausting Giorgio, James Joyce's son. She is daring, has a good body, and a nose like a turnip. The artists allege she is a dilettante, but her dollars still shine brightly. Tanguy has already left his wife for her. Marcel Duchamp, positioning himself ahead of the pack, won't let her go and is her adviser on what to buy.

Peggy bursts in like a storm, unleashing her four Maltese dogs who hurl themselves onto the paintings. She is wearing outsized dark glasses, a Paul Poiret suit, and lets her coat drop onto the first available chair.

'How cold it is! Paris is a refrigerator.'

The only thing the artist can think about is how to defend his paintings against the four dogs. Peggy calls them 'my darlings', and they surround Leonora, who pets them.

'Are these all yours?' the patron enquires.

'This one is by Carrington, the most talented of my disciples.'

Guggenheim observes Leonora being feted by her Maltese dogs.

'I want to buy this one here. I find the horse up in a tree like a bird quite charming.' She points to *The Meal of Lord Candlestick*.

‘They represent the artist’s family. Lord Candlestick is in reality Harold Carrington, satirised by his daughter. These equine heads are phallic, and the round plates are Communion hosts. Branches sprout from the wild boar’s anus. Don’t you find it resembles a Hieronymus Bosch?’

‘So the young woman comes from the aristocracy.’

‘She has an extraordinary talent. Breton and Marcel Duchamp invited her to show two or three of her works in the recent International Surrealist Exhibition. ‘

‘Yes, I have been to see it. It includes very few women: just Eileen Agar, the Norwegian Elsa Thorensen, the Spaniard Remedios Varo, the German Meret Oppenheim who, from what I’ve been told, was her lover, and the young English aristocrat.’

‘Breton is enchanted by Leonora, he says she is the great female figure of Surrealism, and her outlandishness keeps him subjugated. He is convinced he has discovered the only woman capable of *amour fou*,’ continues Max Ernst.

The little dogs sit in a ring around Leonora, and Max invites Peggy to dinner, and says he will come by and collect her from the Ritz at eight that evening.

‘It’s better that you go alone,’ Leonora suggests.

‘Why?’

‘Because I prefer the dogs and they won’t admit them there.’

At the Tour d’Argent Max devotes himself to impressing the North American, gazing at her without blinking with his two blue fishes. She orders the profiteroles, he Poor Knights of Windsor, and, while they eat, they trust that *The Meal of Lord Candlestick* will be but the first of many to come. Neither of the fellow diners foresees how the war will drive them apart.

Returning home, Max appears handsomer than ever, and says to Leonora:

‘That woman has intelligent eyes.’

Paris rejects the Surrealists, the critics are implacable, those who desert the cause are numerous, and it seems providential to Leonora that her lover has found a protector.

11. BODIES IN SPACE

SPINNING FURTHER OUT OF CONTROL, Madame Aurenche turns up at the house, and demands her rights — 'I am your wife' — weeps copiously and stamps her feet. Max persuades her to depart and, when he wishes to leave the house with Leonora, she jumps out from behind the door and grabs him by the arm.

'You promised me we would go to the concert at the Salle Pleyel, remember?' Max doesn't know how to get rid of her. She makes a big impression on Leonora, with her pretty doll's face and her forehead covered in ringlets. She had seemed anything but fragile to her at the Café de Flore, but now her whole aspect, from her hands to her hairstyle, exudes fragility.

The three of them listen together to the first of the Six Brandenburg Concertos, and Max explains that musical instruments are celestial bodies. 'Just like God?' enquires Marie-Berthe, who refers everything back to divine judgement. Ernst tells her they are more beautiful and turned in the stratosphere before God was invented: all of them, including musical notes, circles, comets, shooting stars, heavenly bodies, the lot. She protests:

'You're lying. They never taught me any of this at my catechism class. I shall scream!'

Max challenges her. 'Go ahead and scream, then!'

Leonora feels as if her soul is shrinking, not so much because of the shouting in the middle of the concert, but because Marie-Berthe's main recourse is to blackmail.

'Max, the doctor has told me you cannot deny me anything because I'm ill. And I have no-one to look after me, I am an orphan. Is my mother up in Heaven?'

'I don't think so.'

'In Hell?'

'Maybe your mother is a multiplication table turning in infinite space, or a violin as yet undiscovered circling the universe.'

'Ouch! Sometimes I think you must be the devil.'

'How good it is that you don't think I'm an angel!'

Leonora celebrates each and every reply given by her lover.

If Max does not agree with her, the Frenchwoman says she will write to the Pope, that the Vatican will take her side, and at two in the morning she runs out of doors, and flings herself down in front of the Cathedral of Notre Dame, until at last a gendarme notices her.

'Kill me, death is all I await, you are the Angel of Death,' and she throws herself into his arms.

'Monsieur, I am returning your wife to you,' he says as he hands

her over at the Rue des Plantes.

Max attempts to calm her down. He locks her indoors, and Marie-Berthe rips his canvases, destroys his tools, attacks the bicycles and punctures their tyres, unravels twine from its spools, breaks his test tubes, only in order then to beg his forgiveness in her most stentorian tones. No sooner does the priest see her entering the confessional than he offers her absolution, in order to avert further dramas. Every time Max rejects her, she returns to the church to shout: 'God has united me with this man for my entire lifetime, he sets every cell and nerve in me jangling: Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Virgin of Lourdes have to return him to me. He is my h-u-s-b-a-n-d and we are joined by the laws of God and man. The Englishwoman is a shameless usurper, so cast her off into the Channel.'

'Be patient, Leonora, this woman is a child, ridding myself of her is going to take a while, you have to understand …'

Max doesn't look as handsome any more, the indecision is making him lose his looks, what on earth can he do with these two women? When Marie-Berthe turns up in the Rue Jacob, he hides, and of course she finds him.

'It's the fourth time I've come round,' and she kisses him.

Leonora doesn't know what to believe.

'And who is this woman?' Marie-Berthe affects not to recognise her. 'Are you and I never going to be alone together?'

The scenes multiply, with Madame Aurenche pursuing them down the street, for she follows every move the couple make. One day when Leonora accompanies Max to his studio on the Rue des Plantes, Marie-Berthe forces her way in and embraces him.

'I have come to let you know that you and I are going on holiday,' she says, ignoring Leonora, 'and I need to speak to you alone.'

Max looks frightened. 'Excuse me, Leonora, I need to sort this matter out. Would you like to take a bath? I shall be back in twenty minutes.'

A bath? What a peculiar idea, but then, just possibly, it could be a good one. Leonora removes her shoes and stockings and walks about barefoot. Why not? After the bath, she inspects the studio that Max has been filling with broken bicycles, and half-made objects. He has lined up bottles, books, tyres, bottles of oil, cheap statuettes, keys, hammers and spools of string set out on stands. His book titles have more to do with mechanics and plumbing than with painting: *Man and Bicycle, Problems with Pedals and Bells, Electricity and Electrical Sockets, Free Wheels and Spare Tyres, Regulators of Centrifugal Force, Ballast and Levers* and the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Alongside a lifelike string of garlic made, in fact, of porcelain, a couple of cockroaches are attempting to escape from a matchbox. A

pair of mechanic's gloves and a spinning distaff catch her eye. On the distaff is a black corset decorated with purple lace and embroidered with rosebuds. It is waiting for Leonora to put it on. She ties the waistband and the thing dangles down to her knees. 'Why do I have such skinny thighs?' She visualises her legs as strong and hot and closes her eyes.

Marie-Berthe opens the door: 'What are you still doing here? Listen, my husband and I are going on holiday tomorrow, and you can clear straight off home to your island!'

'I shall leave when he asks me to.'

'You shall leave right now!' she bawls. 'Your toenails are disgusting!'

In fact she is right; Leonora's toenails are too long.

Leonora bends down to pick up her shoes, but the corset gets in her way.

'I am leaving. Not even my father ever dared to shout at me.'

'Then take off Max's corset!'

'Max's corset?' Leonora is smiling.

'Max is an innocent child and you are an idiot. I do not permit him to mingle with riffraff such as you. Why can't you leave us in peace? We were perfectly happy together until you came along. Don't you realise how very, very ill I am?' she flings herself on the floor. 'I am dying and I only have a few months left to live.'

'Then go on and get it over with!' Leonora exclaims indignantly.

Marie-Berthe lies kicking and hammering on the floor. She is choking with sobs and affects to faint.

Leonora sets about lifting her up.

'I'll do it,' says Max, restraining her. 'She is capable of bringing about her own death. I'll put her to bed.'

Marie-Berthe comes back to life.

'I refuse to go to bed while this swine is still in the house.'

'It's clear that I am the intruder here,' says Leonora, and leaves.

'Wait,' commands Max.

Marie-Berthe howls.

'On second thoughts, I think it is perhaps better for you to leave,' he says trembling.

'Fine.'

He catches up with her at the door and murmurs: 'Café de Flore, inside of an hour.'

Leonora sits down at a table and within three minutes a blonde comes up to ask her: '*Avez-vous du feu?'* Leonora lights her cigarette for her.

'One can see from a mile off that you're English, since only the English ask for tea at this time of day. My name is Carlota and I came

from Hungary to look for work in France.'

'What kind of work?'

'As a streetwalker.'

They talk for three-quarters of an hour until Max arrives, bearing a scratch running from his right eye to his mouth. One look at him, and Carlota says goodbye.

'Let's leave Paris, and go to St. Martin d'Ardèche, I don't think I can stand her another minute. I'm also sick of all the arguments and lawsuits between the Surrealists.'

Leonora agrees at once. What she does not know is that her lover discovered this village beside the river thanks to Marie-Berthe, nor that she was born in the Aurenche family home right there, in the Ardèche. In spite of all the worry caused by the mental collapse of his second wife, he has no hesitation in taking refuge at her place of birth with another woman.

'I think it is better for you to go now to the Rue Jacob to pack your case. I'll come by for you at half-past six. The best thing would be for us to get there as early as possible.'

'Did Marie-Berthe suffer a genuine seizure?'

'You saw her there in a dead faint on the floor.'

The Surrealists drown in orgies of emotion. The shop window where they display themselves is at breaking point. Everyone in the group criticises, destroys, and splatters each other with blood and saliva: 'Cocteau is a chameleon,' 'That Romanian Tzara is on the skids and can only speak as if he were inside his book, *Parler Seul.* Ever since he got married to his Swedish Nobel he has become insufferable.' 'Soupault has become petrified in automatism and has written nothing of merit since *Le Grand Homme*;' 'Duchamp did the right thing in making a mockery of Cézanne and then, after three or four *chefs-d'oeuvre,* to exchange his paintbrush for pawns on a chessboard, because by then he had said all he had to say,' 'Giacometti, bottle in hand, threatened to throw himself down off his terrace on the Rue des Plantes,' 'Dalí is nauseating, he has sold out, he's a whore,' 'Leonor Fini thinks she is the empress of the gauchos. She should be packed off to Patagonia to shear sheep.'

The group is a runaway stallion and Leonora, excellent Amazon that she is, almost impossible to unseat. 'I came to Paris to paint,' she repeats to herself over and over again, even when Marie-Berthe's dramas disrupt everything.

12. LOVER OF THE WIND

THE BICYCLES TRAVEL WITH THEM, tied to the back of their convertible car. The French are fanatical about cycling, and Leonora baptises Max's red bicycle *Darling Little Mabel* and gives her orange one the name *Roger of Kildare,* four wheels rolling as one, on towards freedom. Watching the countryside beside the main road passing the car window relaxes them, after all Marie-Berthe's scenes. Leonora's lover tells her how Jean Arp, the friend of his adolescence, saved himself from prison when he stripped off his clothes in front of the authorities: scandal disarms the fearful and prudish. Leonora recounts how as a child, she could hardly manage to distinguish between the French verbs 'to be' and 'to have' and that Mlle. Varenne had her repeat them along with her multiplication tables.

The heat makes them open the windows, and the song of the crickets lets them know they have reached the south. The air is heaving with the heat, and Leonora feels it too. 'This is me', and she suddenly recognises that she can't bear to lose a single second of what she is living, that Max is enormous and envelops everything, that her entire life has been lived for this very moment, that to make a false step or to look behind her could cause her instant death, that nothing to do with Max will ever leave her, not even a single white hair of his head, that his hands on her belly are just like those of the eagle on its prey, and that he won't ever let her go.

Leonora is driving: 'I don't feel too secure here. In England, Ireland and Scotland, the steering wheel is on the right.' Her lover gives her directions. They cross a long narrow bridge, turn off to the right, and arrive at St. Martin d'Ardèche. There is just enough light for them to notice two squashed hedgehogs in the middle of the road.

'At long last, you and I are going to live alone together,' says Leonora joyously. 'I am ready to die in your arms.'

'I too would die for you. But before I eat you up, let's find somewhere to have supper.'

'Always so practical.'

They are greeted by the sounds of an inn heaving with breasts and buttocks on the eve of the local fete. The lovers walk towards it hand in hand.

'I have a room with two beds, without bathroom or board,' Alphonsine, the owner, yells at them as if the pair were deaf.

'What do you mean? Don't you eat here?'

'Yes, of course I eat,' she guffaws loudly, 'it's you two who don't. My mother is too old now to cook, and I don't plan on doing any more work than necessary. You can eat next door, in Marie's house, where

she also sells cigarettes.'

'It's true, I only have a few cigarettes left.' Leonora is getting worried.

'Perhaps it's better that you start by showing us the bedroom,' orders the painter.

'It's dirty. After the last five guests, the sheets now stink of bacon.'

Alphonsine spies the bicycles.

'Those are magnificent. Would you lend me a bike one afternoon, to visit a lover who lives eight kilometres away?'

'Of course,' replies Max.

An army of flies and any number of spiders have taken up residence in the room, furnished only with a sack of potatoes, a string of garlic and a disused stove.

'It'll do for now. Let's go and set up camp across the river.'

Marie has a wart just like the Reverend Mother's, back in the Convent of the Holy Sepulchre.

They eat river fish and eels with mustard. They drink wine, but in reality Leonora wants only to drink in her lover, whom by now she can no longer distinguish from herself. The peasants tell them of the annual surges of the Rhône that sometimes flood the village. 'This year we had a good crop of cherries, and we've also bottled fruit and made jam for you to enjoy, along with a vast quantity of olives in brine.' 'You must visit the Pont Saint Esprit.' The inhabitants are friendly and, as the couple are a novelty, they watch them walking arm in arm and kissing on street corners. After a while Alphonsine, whom they call Fonfon, knows all about the lovers and becomes their accomplice. Not only does she come to live Max and Leonora's life as if it were her own, but she is also well aware of the dangers stalking them. The presence of the Englishwoman and her lover in St. Martin is the best story she has ever come across.

'Last night when you were out, a woman phoned you from Paris. She is now on her way here.'

'It's her. Let's go to Carcassonne, to Joë Bousquet's house. France is large enough for us to find somewhere to hide.'

On the 27th May 1918 at Vailly, near the end of the First World War, twenty-one-year-old Joë Bousquet took a bullet in his back. He now lives with all the windows in his house shuttered. The bullet in his spinal cord restricts him to his bed and to opium for the rest of his life. He claims that thanks to this wound he has learnt that all men are wounded. He writes: 'Who am I? I float between two personae, that of my heart and the other of my death.'

He is preparing little balls of opium. Max and Leonora smoke with him as their guide. Joë Bousquet, propped up on his pillows in

his room, in the perpetual twilight that admits no rays of sunlight, speaks very slowly. Leonora asks him if he does not feel angry at his fate and he replies that even before his accident on the battlefield, he was a lost man.

'Why?' asks Leonora.

'Because I was already an addict.'

His life might as well have been ended by the bullet.

'I am a man blown by the winds, imprisoned by silence and solitude.'

Leonora discovers that Max, in calling her his 'lover of the wind', uses a title he took from Joë Bousquet — who writes metaphysics and composes allegories for a number of magazines, such as the *Cahiers du Sud.*

'Lover of the wind' describes a plant without roots, pursued by the wind, which everyone tramples and breaks. The villagers call her 'lover of the wind' to make fun of her, and Jules Michelet confirms that this plant, set in motion by a draught of air, enjoys a particular privilege: it flourishes even in the most violent whirlwinds.

'Ever since a friend started bringing me hashish from Marseilles, every couple of nights I feel better, because the effect is gentle and lasting.'

Bousquet inhales a big mouthful of smoke, holds his breath and allows a thin stream of it to escape through nearly closed lips.

One day Leonora finds him very pale. Bald, his face of indeterminate age is the colour of marble and he keeps shivering. Under each armpit there are large and spreading patches of sweat.

'Are you cold? Do you feel all right?' she asks.

'I am so tired and my stomach aches.' Icy water trickles down from his brow and his spectacles slide down his nose.

Leonora wipes his forehead. To her, a first-time user, the drug doesn't have the same effect as on Max, who appears to be familiar with it; he doubles up swathed in opium smoke and forgets all about Leonora, Joë and Marie-Berthe.

Time stands still. The light shines green, as if they were in an aquarium.

'You look like a medieval page,' Joë tells Leonora. 'Carcassonne is the city of troubadours and Cathars. Stay here forever.'

Leonora is becoming restless.

'You are out of danger here; and away from time. There are no clocks here. I have also decided to remain in ignorance of the date and the day of the week. Calm down and close your eyes.'

Opium has caused Joë Bousquet to reach the sea floor of his dreams and to fall for imaginary women. He confides in Leonora that to love a woman is to become carnally that woman:

‘I have lived as a woman, and I’ve yearned to give birth and to nourish the offspring with my own essence.’

The bullet lodged in his body follows its own trajectory. The pain debilitates him, opium is the sole remedy for his urinary tract disease, caused by the collapse of his kidneys.

‘Doesn’t someone come in to look after you? What do you eat?’

‘I find people so stupid that I prefer to be alone. I eat a lot of stewed fruit. Would you like to taste a sugared fruit? I have lots of different ones, but the plums are the most delicious.’

‘The Red Queen even fed jam to her horses.’

‘Oh yes?’ Bousquet sounds interested.

‘She sent me an invitation, decorated with lace, roses and swallows, embossed with letters in gold. I called my chauffeur to take me in my car to the palace but, as he’s a total idiot, he had buried the car to grow mushrooms in, and as a result, the engine packed up. His stupidity obliged me to hire a carriage drawn by two horses. At the entrance to the palace, a servant dressed all in red and gold warned me: “The queen went mad last night. She is in the bath tub.”’

Joë Bousquet opens his eyes wide.

‘Which queen? The Queen of England?’

‘The Red Queen.’

‘She’s the good one! Do you think they’ll bury me too, just like your car?’

‘I think you’ll fall to the floor like a plump plum, plop, just like that.’

Bousquet smiles and takes her by the hand.

‘It’s a treat to meet you! What do you do to give yourself courage, Leonora?’

‘I sing. Or I repeat “horse, horse, horse, horse, horse” in place of saying my rosary.’

Out of love for life, Joë Bousquet at first wanted to destroy it, but has now accepted to die of it. The years of opium have anaesthetised his pain and muffled the longing to kill himself.

‘Wounded, I became my own wound. I survived in the flesh, the shame of my desires … The last years approach humbly, anxious to assist, each year bearing its own lantern. Long live my disgrace!’

It is a relief for Leonora to escape this room, where nothing enters save opium and the suffering of a poet, pained and painful, still striving to make sense of his circumstances.

13. AUBERGINES

THE COUPLE DECIDE TO RETURN to St. Martin d'Ardèche. Once there, Alphonsine informs them that Marie-Berthe Aurenche came by, looking for Max.

Every morning they slowly make their way down to a river running along a pebbled shore and over stones so white they whiten the water above them. The river changes to a shade of dark green in the deepest pools along the way, then widens and flows smoothly out to sea. They strip and leap off the river bank, Leonora's mane of black hair in stark contrast to all the white. They remain there for hours on end and nobody sees when they embrace, for the river belongs to them alone. When they stretch out in the sun, the white stones retain the echo of their bodies, cradling them to sleep. Max is her guide. Sometimes he takes her by the hand, at others he releases her; he is the superior bird. The river bank is white.

'Let's go in to the water.'

Her lover pulls her up and they enter the river. As the sun reaches its zenith, his outline begins to blur.

'The stones want to eat you, to absorb you, I can't see you any more.'

The leafiness of its dark pools prevents her from being entirely swallowed up. 'Leonora, Leonora, Leonora, Leonora,' Max repeats to her sex, her armpits, her leafy hair, and they make love like last night, like this morning, like right now. The stones form a wall behind them: 'Soldiers, aim for their hearts, fire!'

The river's whiteness remains etched in their memory. It resembles the high chalky mountains that now surround them. The rocks, carved into a hundred different creatures, remind Max of a man who devoted his life to transforming the countryside into a zoo. He sculpted lions, bears, tigers, centaurs, government ministers and historical personages. The cypresses growing in the cemetery remind him of the wigs worn by women at Court in the eighteenth century.

'I don't think the villagers are too pleased by our stripping off,' murmurs Leonora.

'The bears, cats, rats, lambs, dogs and birds cover themselves in skin, hair, feathers and hide, and we never say that they are naked. Prawns, crabs and cockroaches wear their own creaky carapaces. Man is born naked and clothes don't grow on him, he obtains them from other skins, not out of an urge to appear decent but out of necessity. Going around dressed doesn't render us any more virtuous.'

'Oh no? And what is this thing called virtue?'

'Virtue is the performance of pleasurable acts.'

‘Then what is vice?’

‘Vice is the failure to perform pleasurable acts. Life is very simple; it consists in being born, dying and, at some point between the two, marrying and having children. All the rest, sacrifice, renunciation, loneliness, lead us only into the sin of sterility.’

‘We are scandalising the local people,’ Leonora warns him.

‘That is their problem, not ours. Invite Fonfon to come and bathe with the two of us. Her flesh is so ample on her bones that she is bound not to accept. Decency resides not in her body but in her mind.’

It rains during the night, so next day they set out in search of snails.

‘Don’t go up to collect them in the cemetery, because I refuse to cook any you find there. You’ll find masses of them on the small wall running alongside Noel’s vineyards.’

They hand over four dozen snails to Alphonsine.

‘You have to keep them for three days until they die of hunger,’ Max informs Leonora, ‘and then you need to wash them in salt water and vinegar. They produce loads of slime but after all that are nice and clean, ready to be stewed in a garlic sauce. They taste delicious!’

While her lover sleeps, Leonora gets up and inspects a spider spinning down by its thread from the ceiling, dangling in the stripes of sunlight entering between the slats of Venetian blinds. She tries to recall the rhyme Alphonsine taught her: ‘*Araignée du matin, chagrin; araignée du midi, souci; araignée du soir, espoir.*’

The country vineyards enchant Leonora. The peasants care for their vines as if they were children. Wine is the reason the soldiers decided to follow Joan of Arc; wine was what crowned Saint Louis King of France, with the kegs stacked in the cellars, his throne was made from the biggest barrels of the finest wood. Ever since the Middle Ages, peasants have hung vine leaves over their front doors so the good spirits would look kindly upon them, and the harvest prove abundant.

‘The best vintages were 1914 and 1932,’ Alphonsine tells her. ‘Some people in these parts bury a live frog underneath each vine because it enhances the quality of the wine.’

At the next table a couple are talking in strong Marseilles accents.

‘Are you camping near here?’ Max asks them.

‘Yes, just across the river. The locals say that it is dangerous …’

‘And you wouldn’t like to sell us your tent?’

Three days later, Max becomes a camper.

In the shade of the bluff, on the river bank of the Ardèche, the tent resembles a bundle of washing deposited there by a washer-woman. Leonora sits down at the edge of the water to brush her teeth. A few little fish breakfast on toothpaste and drink her saliva. She

raises her eyes and spots a village clinging to the mountainside, with white houses and black cypresses.

'I think we should walk up there.' Leonora points it out to Max, who is busily pretending to be a cobra lying in the sun.

'Today is far too hot, I really don't like to walk so much in the heat.'

'We could swim there,' and Leonora indicates the mountain.

'A mountain can only be climbed,' replies Max, his head breaking the water, surrounded by a halo of fishes.

Whenever he emerges from the water, his eyes are two incredibly beautiful blue fishes, and his head is crowned with frothy white plumes. He stretches himself out beside Leonora.

'What in the world could I love more than water and hot stones?' he murmurs, rubbing his stomach. 'How sweet our life is now, Leonora … and next of all, I would like to catch a few of those little fishes and fry them,' he continues with a cruel smile. 'You squeeze lemon over them before crunching them between your teeth. I'm hungry, go and open one of those boxes and get at the cheese. Bring bread and tomatoes. Oh — and don't forget the wine.'

'Does sir require anything further?'

'Grapes, bring them all over here.'

Leonora returns as asked and they eat in the midst of a cloud of flies before falling asleep. When Leonora wakes up, feeling stifled by so much sun, she sees the mountain has turned dark with shadow. Her lover is emitting a series of strangely sad sounds she can't decipher.

'It wouldn't worry me in the least to climb your mountain now, Leonora.' Max yawns and stretches his arms.

A path leads them to a ruined arch and, the more they climb, the more isolated they feel. The streets are as black as night and fig trees grow inside the houses. A goat emerges from a doorway and stares haughtily down at them.

'It is not a goat, it is a reptile,' Leonora advises Max.

Either way, it is the only living being they encounter. Across a crevice, they find themselves overlooking a little garden at the end of which is a wall — all that separates them from the void where, many thousands of metres down, the river runs.

At the summit of the mountain, the castle with its three sharply pointed turrets scrapes the sky. The owner is Viscount Cyril de Guindre who lives immured among the books of his library, in the company of an eccentric daughter who enjoys riding in the nude. Her name is Mlle. la Vicomtesse Drusille.

'We could dress up as bishops and offer solemn black masses on the rock.'

Leonora closes her eyes in ecstasy and sees herself beside her

lover clothed in a purple chasuble, a mitre on his head, wielding a crosier capable of exorcising the Devil himself.

The canter of horse's hooves rouses her from her pontifical daydream. An Amazon wearing only a cropped jacket dismounts and kisses Max.

'Good evening, my precious little lovey-dovey poo poo,' is how she addresses Max. It is astonishing that a woman who looks every bit as strong as a man can produce such a sickly and affected voice. 'Oh my poor little one, you are tired. Would you like to come and dine at the castle?'

'Not today. Tomorrow.'

Drusille kisses Max on the nose and spurs on her horse.

'You may bring her with you if you choose.' She points towards the English Lady Bishop who offers her a blessing by way of farewell.

'Have you emerged from your pontifical daydream?'

'Yes, that woman of Lawhore woke me up.'

Leonora observes Max gathering spiky leaves that smell incredibly sweet.

'What are you going to do with those flowers?'

'According to legend,' he tells her as he picks another handful, 'an extremely ugly young woman, Miralda by name, used to go out wearing a veil so that no-one could see her face. Even so, a wizard fell in love with the scent of her hair, and possessed her. When he awoke and saw her face, he was so horrified that he buried her alive, leaving only her hair outside the grave. They became these flowers, thereafter called Miralda's Curls.'

Leonora inhales the aroma of her fingers impregnated with the scent of Miralda's Curls, then throws back her head: 'What an intense perfume!'

'Let me see. I think that now we have enough. We are going to need two stones, one flat and the other round. And we also need to get a move on before it gets dark.'

Leonora again inhales the scent on her fingers, impregnated with Miralda's Curls. Near where they have set up camp, Max asks her to light a candle and, on his knees, smashes the flowers against the flat stone.

After crushing them, he puts them on to boil. The odour is delicious.

'Do you see?' he explains. 'With this type of herb you can make cigarettes that are better and cheaper than Gauloises. The only thing we still need is the rice paper in which to roll them. Let's go and find some. If we leave the fire burning it'll all be ready on our return.'

Barely have they got to the square when Alphonsine calls out to them: 'It's three days since I last saw you. Come over to dinner!'

And she rails at Leonora: ‘Why do you abandon me? Go and get some vegetables and I’ll make you aubergines gratinées. Marie can pick them for you straight from her garden.’

Marie selects two purple globes dangling in the midst of some prickly leaves and holds them out to Leonora.

‘How many tomatoes would you like?’ She carries on searching in the dark. ‘And I’ve got some good lettuces somewhere here.’

Leonora and Max sit down on the terrace. The other dinner guests are a grave-digger, a goat herd, a blind girl who smokes constantly, and elderly Mathieu, who has become part of the furniture, and keeps rolling cigarette after cigarette. Before long, Fonfon is setting a platter of aubergines in a ruby-red sauce down in front of them.

‘Leonora, if you would like the grave-digger to take measurements for your coffin, now would be a good opportunity.’

The grave-digger rises and advances on her. Alphonsine, seated next to the painter, picks her teeth with a stick. The rest of the company disappear, leaving only Mathieu. Alphonsine takes delight in speaking ill of the neighbours, particularly the drunk, lazy and abusive ones.

‘Maybe they are just poor?’ Max springs to their defence. ‘In any case, I don’t believe in work.’

‘Where does Mathieu buy the papers you use to roll your tobacco?’ Leonora asks.

‘Aaaa!’ grunts the old man.

Fonfon translates for him: ‘At the tobacconist.’

Leonora and Max bid their farewells.

‘Tomorrow Mathieu will bring some figs, and a fat rabbit. I shall casserole it in its juices with rosemary, and it’ll taste exquisite.’

After buying two packets of rice paper, they return to their tent guided by the light of the moon. The waters of the Ardèche flow gently beside their path. Inside the tent the coals are still glowing under the little pot, which smells good. A curtain of steam rises when Max sets the pan down in the river in order to cool it.

‘Now the leaves are dried out and will be at their best.’ He transforms the concoction into cigars. ‘You can tell me just how good this is.’ Max lights one of them.

‘Who taught you how to do that?’

‘You have not the least idea of all I know. And with a dose this high, all my worries will go up in smoke.’

‘At least your wife won’t be able to find her way here. Will she?’

‘You don’t know Marie-Berthe.’

His wife has been left in the care of a semi-literate youth.

‘Do you think that if something happens, he will telephone me?’ Max asks Leonora.

‘I don’t know,’ she answers from far, far away, for the sound of her voice seems to be issuing several metres over her head. ‘I don’t think it really matters that much.’

‘Yes it does matter,’ replies Max. ‘The village is so small that if she turns up here, she’ll find us at once.’

‘It doesn’t matter, nothing matters now …’ Leonora assures him, by now having flown as high as a kite.

14. POSTMAN *CHEVAL*

THERE'S NOT MUCH TO DO besides either walking or scaling the rocky heights. Max knows about astronomy, Leonora about the moon, which she believes waxes and wanes like a woman's body, and governs her monthly cycles. Her master of astronomy, Father O'Connor, taught her the constellations which she now teaches Max. She also informs him about green, blue and grey crickets and, when a vulture swoops down out of the blue, announces sadly:

'There must be an animal lying dead in a field somewhere near here.'

Max explains that the insides of particular mushrooms are like egg whites and, since Leonora relishes eating eggs, she eats the mushrooms. Max seems to carry a great burden inside him, keeps silent much of the time and, when he doesn't, restricts himself to explaining to Leonora the tortuous and magical ways in which nature behaves.

Sometimes, while out walking, they meet a postman with a white moustache. In order to assume his profession, he was obliged to swear an oath. In France, postmen have to vow that every letter will arrive at its destination intact. They wear military-style uniforms: to become a postman is to undertake a sacred mission. Those who have no bicycles sometimes cross long distances on foot, following breaks in the lines of trees in order to reach their destination. The sun burns them, the rains soak them and the snows freeze them. The postman of St. Martin d'Ardèche has penetrating eyes half-hidden beneath his navy blue cap, and all at once Max is reminded of *Facteur Cheval* — 'Postman Horse' — and his expression alters immediately:

'Let's go by train to Hauterives, Leonora. Do you remember the poem that Breton read to you, dedicated to a postman? We are near Ferdinand Cheval's Ideal Palace. It won't matter how long it takes, nor the conditions of the journey, if we keep the prospect of that place in mind. You really must meet him.'

'Is he a horse, like his name?' Leonora claps her hands in anticipation.

On one of his deliveries, Ferdinand Cheval tripped on a stone that caused him to fall; he had never seen one like it, so he looked for more, and he found them. He was no longer a young man, already forty-three years old. First he kept the stones in his pockets, and then he began storing them in a barrel, until finally he took them in a wheelbarrow to the place where he was going to build his castle. 'He has respected his name,' Leonora thinks. 'He has worked like a horse.'

With mortar and cement and over a period of thirty-three years,

Ferdinand Cheval converted the stones into insects, feathers, palms, towers, draw-bridges, animals, waterfalls, star fish, angels, horns, roses … so building his *Palais Idéal*, which had a little about it of a Swiss chalet, a Hindu temple, and the niches and minarets of a mosque.

On top of the little wheelbarrow, Leonora discovers a plaque on which Cheval pays the palace due homage with the lines:

'Now that its work is done
may it rest in peace from its labours
and in the house it built
I, its humble friend,
occupy the seat of honour.'

'What did his neighbours make of it, Max?'

'The same thing they make of us: they decided that he was weak in the head. Do you know that I dedicated a painting to him? *To Postman Cheval*.'

'Where do you keep it?'

'I gave it to Louise.'

During the return journey from Hauterives, Max reads and Leonora keeps her nose glued to the window, watching the children waving vigorously as the train goes by. Barely has she closed her eyes when a voice that seems to emerge from the depths of a tunnel awakens her: 'St. Martin d'Ardèche.'

Leonora is respectful of her lover's silences and amuses herself in recollections of the best times of her life at Crookhey Hall: the day she first went skating on the iced-over lake, the night she got drunk on tepid beer with Tim, the chauffeur's son, in her father's car, and the hangover that went on for so long that she vomited in front of all the guests on the tennis court the next afternoon.

Alphonsine knocks on their door in a state of high agitation to announce: 'There's a woman downstairs who insists she's Ernst's wife. She tried to snatch the tray I was holding in my hand: "*I'll* take his *café au lait* upstairs to him." I wasn't going to have that, though.'

'Curses!' The painter awakes. 'I shall go down and see her.'

Leonora is left waiting for three hours.

Alphonsine comes back upstairs to tell her what has been going on in the living room: 'He has taken her down to the river.'

'What?'

'Yes, the first thing he asked her was: 'What are you doing here?' He did not seem in the least put out, and suggested they take a walk together. They took the path that runs down to the Ardèche, and he was holding her by the arm.'

'He was holding her by the arm?'

Finally, Max returns: 'I have to take her to her aunt's house over

at Valence, not far from here, to let her calm down. If I spend three days there with her, she promises faithfully to leave us in peace.'

It is a blow for Leonora thus to discover the extent of Max's weakness. There's a sharp flare in her nostrils when he repeats that Marie-Berthe wants only three days of his time. Three days are not nothing; they don't flow by like water.

'What about me?' cries out Leonora.

'Just three days. You and I have our whole lives ahead of us, she has understood that I am going to leave her.'

Leonora looks him up and down, while he is begging her to wait there for him. Marie-Berthe is in a very bad way, and he has to accompany her to Valence. She, Leonora, is not in a bad way. Quite the opposite, she is a dynamo and a goat. The other woman is the desperate case. Leonora grows angry, he can take his ex-wife to the station, he can put her on a train; if Marie-Berthe has managed to find her way this far, she has sufficient strength to get back home by herself.

Leonora is besieged by the vipers of fear. Marie-Berthe will snare him, prevent him from returning at all costs. She is the one Max will leave behind, not his legitimate partner. The person who'll lose in this game is her, the Englishwoman. The one who's now set to win the match is the Frenchwoman, the one who belongs to him, the one on home turf, the one who supports Max. *Maurie … Mama … where are you? Maurie, help me, what shall I do?* And her mother's voice helps her by aiding her anger.

'Max, if you leave, you won't find me here when you come back.'

She spits it out at him, but with her head held high. There is no way this German man is going to humiliate her. If he wants to play the fool, believing she'll come back to him, the more fool he. Leonora is a mare and she's rearing on her hind legs, her front hooves ready to pound down on him. Max jumps backwards before the fury of the Englishwoman's onslaught.

'Do you take me for an imbecile?'

Alphonsine leans out of the window: 'Your wife is pacing up and down like a caged animal.'

'I promise I'll be back in three days, little Leonora.' Max embraces her.

'Don't call me little, I am not an idiot. If you leave now, then I'll leave in the opposite direction.'

'Where to? What will you do?'

'That's my business,' she responds, incandescent with rage, while she ponders if she could find some menial job or other to support herself.

'Wait here for me!'

‘Clear off.’

The last Leonora sees of her lover is his bowed head. His overcoat still hangs in the hall, and Leonora is on the point of calling him back — ‘Max, your overcoat!’ — but instead stands staring at it, as if the garment were capable of hypnotising her.

‘What a weak man!’ comments Alphonsine.

‘Help me pack. I’m off.’

‘Are you going to leave us too? I won’t let you go. A young woman like you, all alone, would be putting herself in danger. Just wait here for three days and he’ll be back.’

‘And in the meantime I am supposed to play the Lady of Shalott?’

‘Who on earth is she?’

‘Her body appears floating down all the rivers of England. Because her lover abandoned her, she decided to drown herself.’

Despite the fact that her hands feel icy and will hardly feel a thing, Leonora gathers up her possessions.

‘Look, my fingers have turned to stone.’

She can carry everything she has in one small bundle.

‘I’m done. Let’s go down to the café and get drunk.’

She sits down and starts on the cheap brandy known as *marc*. It instantly goes to her head.

‘Max has left poor little Leonora all alone,’ reconstructs Alphonsine. ‘Look at her now, bottle in hand …’

‘Don Pascual, the grape picker, has promised to take me to the train station at Orange.’

Fonfon tries to restrain her.

The stationmaster watches her walk down the empty platform.

‘The fast train leaves at half-past nine tonight,’ he informs her.

Leonora leaves her bundle of clothes in a station locker and sets off around the town. In a brasserie she orders one glass of red wine after another until she has drunk a whole bottle. She buys a book and sits down on a bench in the main square.

The hours stagnate as they pass and the afternoon grows cooler. She gives up on the book: it’s impossible to read as the twilight is making the letters merge with the page, and she goes back to the station. On the way she steps out in front of a car, trying to get herself run over:

‘Are you mad?’ the driver furiously shouts at her as he gets out of his car. ‘You stink of wine, young woman!’

Leonora shrugs her shoulders and walks across to the tobacconist. Then she sets off towards the ancient Roman arena, the biggest tourist draw in town. At the entrance, she realises she hasn’t got the strength to go in. She buys a newspaper and then throws it away. She longs to hurt herself. She scratches her left shin with her right foot. ‘If they

poisoned Lucrezia Borgia, why not me?' She goes into a café and makes a phone call to Alphonsine right in front of a couple of other drinkers.

'Stay there until tomorrow morning,' implores Alphonsine. 'Or at the very least give me a phone number so I can call you back with any news.'

The café owner recommends a hotel to her. Hardly has Leonora installed herself there than she is ringing Alphonsine again, to let her know the address and phone number. At nine o'clock she retires to bed, but she can't sleep and at dawn she is up and walking around the town once more. As soon as the first shops begin to open, she buys a bottle of Hennessy and goes back to her room hugging the bottle in her arms. From her window Leonora can see and count the roofs of Orange, as she slugs her way through half the bottle. At eleven o'clock there is a knock at the door.

'Téléphone, mademoiselle, de la part d'Alphonsine.'

She can hardly speak, her mouth is burning from so many cigarettes.

'Max called,' Alphonsine tells her. 'I told him you had gone to Orange, and gave him your phone number. I also warned him that if he didn't ring you, you would probably leave for China or America. He said he would call you immediately.'

15. THE HANGOVER

LEONORA DOES NOTHING except wait and smoke. No sooner does she let the waiters know that she is going to sit on the bench in front of the hotel, than she changes her mind:

'I'll be in my room.'

She goes upstairs to her room, and then comes back down again, finding it unbearable.

'Eat something,' recommends the kindly waiter.

Rather than eat, she orders two black coffees and stares at her reflection in the mirror. 'How pale I am, I look as if I am crazy!' She relishes the thought. Perhaps she'll die and the suffering will be over. Her eardrums pound and a vein in her left temple stands out. She rushes to the telephone every time it rings, regardless of who sees her.

'It is not for you,' the same sympathetic waiter is obliged to keep telling her.

At noon she has finished the bottle and thrown herself down on her bed, intending to go to sleep with it in her arms. An impossibility. At three-thirty in the afternoon she orders a taxi.

'If someone called Max Ernst phones, tell him that I have *not* left for America, but I *have* left to return to St. Martin d'Ardèche.'

The waiters watch her leave with expressions of compassion, because Leonora has explained things to them: 'The man whom I love has genital obligations to another woman.'

'I don't understand,' her accomplice Alphonsine informs her. 'He seemed desperate to know where you were. I do so hope nothing has gone wrong. The people in the village said he took a revolver with him.'

'I don't think so for a moment,' Leonora replies angrily.

'You look like some poor demented female, let me bring you up a cup of cocoa.'

'As you wish. Meanwhile, I'll run quickly to the phone box.'

She returns breathless and with her hair ruffled.

'There's no news.'

'Help yourself to a freshly made cup of coffee,' proposes Marie, 'while I read your cards.'

She cuts the pack and starts to deal.

'You will marry a dark-skinned man and be extremely wealthy. But difficulties will also await you along the way.'

'Will Max return to me?'

'The cards say no,' answers Marie.

That evening some clients were drinking *marc* in the café while Alphonsine recounted the tales of the English girl's fall from grace.

‘The way things look to me, I don’t think her lover will be back,’ opines Mathieu. ‘I’ll invite her to join us for a drink.’

Leonora canvasses support at one table after the next, and everyone offers her a drink. She puts through another call to Orange. ‘No, Madame, no-one has left a message for you.’ Instead of returning to Alphonsine’s café, she walks towards the river whose icy waters descend from the mountains. It has rained heavily.

‘It seems quite likely that the English girl will kill herself,’ Alphonsine comments to her neighbours, ‘and the river will carry her poor little body out to sea.’

Finally, Jimmy Ernst rings to tell her his father is too tired to travel to St. Martin d’Ardèche. Could Alphonsine send on his luggage? ‘Of course not!’ she replies furiously. She relays this to Leonora who lets forth a violent stream of curses.

‘Those are not words fit to be spoken by a lady!’ Alphonsine protests.

The Englishwoman, on the point of replying, is left standing with her mouth wide open, as Max appears in the square on *Darling Little Mabel.* He climbs the stairs with his coat torn and his shirt dishevelled.

‘It looks as if he spent the night with a couple of tigers!’ Alphonsine’s hands fly to her mouth.

‘Come with me, Leonora,’ Max calls her. ‘I’ve never suffered so much in all my life.’

No sooner has he begun to explain to her what he has been through than Alphonsine comes into their room.

‘She’s coming up.’

Shrieks and pummelling at the door force Leonora to open it, only to receive a resounding slap.

She turns and confronts Max, still holding her hand to her cheek. ‘Are you going to send her to hell, or are you leaving with her right now?’

Standing square in the doorway, the legitimate wife awaits him.

‘What are you going to do, Max?’ Leonora persists.

‘I don’t know,’ he answers, terrified.

His eyes shift from one woman to the other. Marie-Berthe laughs hysterically.

‘If you can’t decide, to the devil with you straight away!’

Max obeys and goes down to the street, where, five minutes later, Leonora sees him mounted on *Darling Little Mabel*, pressing his right foot down on the pedal, and Marie-Berthe placing both her hands on the handlebars of *Roger of Kildare.*

‘My bicycle!’ cries out Leonora.

Marie-Berthe puts her tongue out at her.

Aroused by the sound of scandal, the villagers lean out of their

windows.

Without looking at any of them, Leonora heads for the church and urinates in the middle of the aisle, standing erect before the altar:

'How's that for your holy water, you crappy saints.'

Her skirts still lifted, she descends to the river, now clogged with mud and tree trunks. The little beach where their tent and camp once stood has vanished. Leonora spies a ghost on the other river bank: Max removes his rucksack and shirt and throws himself in the water to swim across to her.

The Ardèche woods are painted in their early autumn colours and the water has turned to shining gold. Leonora thinks it a good thing that summer is behind her. The streets look even more abandoned than she feels. Vine leaves catch at her cheek and a bird falls at her feet, staining the dust with its blood. Crickets sing away furiously and fill her head with their chirruping. The sound causes a stinging in her eyes.

Leonora hides behind the chapel to smoke her Curls of Miralda. As inhaling them has no effect, she eats one by one all the tiny spiky leaves which numb her palate to sleep. 'I am a cow masticating her thoughts.' The bats sing a Bach Mass, Leonora joins in and sings so loudly that the stained glass windows in the chapel shiver then shatter. Nothing could have afforded her greater pleasure. After swallowing the whole handful of Curls of Miralda she returns to Alphonsine's café, only to find a large table covered with a linen cloth.

'What's happening, Alphonsine?'

'It's the village fete. I want to introduce you to Panthilde and to Agathe from Drues Airlines, two of the great personages doing us the honour.'

'Where is Drusille de Guindre?'

'We did not invite her.'

Leonora sits down at the table and suddenly remarks on how the roses are sprouting out of the cloth and growing all the way up to the ceiling. Buds of every colour are opening — red, white, blue, scarlet, black — climbing from the table-cloth up the walls.

'You'll soon be feeling much better,' Alphonsine says in a loud voice. 'I can't let you go anywhere in this state.'

A cascade of wine reaches the edges of the table, and Leonora watches while Fonfon calls a waiter, whispering something into his ear as she points at her.

'This fete is in your honour. You are to deliver a speech.'

The waiters emerge from the kitchen, serve the main course, and retire to prepare the next one. Alphonsine issues the orders:

'Hurry up. But be sure to wash the glasses.'

Leonora addresses her neighbour at the dinner table: 'The right

hemisphere of my brain is just as powerful as the left one.'

She lifts her hand to her head and discovers it has changed into that of a horse.

'Do I look odd?' she asks him.

'To me, everyone looks odd,' he replies. 'You, for example, have the profile of a mare.'

'Yes,' says Leonora. 'From this day onwards, I shall keep my horse's face. I also know someone who has had the face of a pig from the day he was born.'

'And what does my face look like?'

'Like a bear. I am English and my absolute favourite is the bat.'

A child dressed as an angel, standing stiff-backed on the table, recites a poem by Lautréamont, while the guests pinch her legs, smack her bottom, and flick balls of paper at her head as if they were all back in the classroom. When she has done her cabaret turn, Alphonsine shoves the girl's head under water until the bubbles stop surfacing. The little corpse floats its way around the table and the guests chuck leftovers from their dinner at her.

'Now open your presents,' Fonfon commands.

The guests exchange vipers, frogs, nightingales, scorpions, butterflies, bats, rabbits, snails, revolvers, knives and red hot coins. A drunken Agathe from Drues Airlines insists that someone teach her how to fire a gun.

'Do you realise this banquet is being held in your honour?' Fonfon repeats. 'We are all waiting for your speech.'

Leonora climbs onto the table, lifts up her head, and sings *Hark, hark, the lark*, bows her head with her hand over her heart, and sits down again in the midst of applause.

Leonora does not manage to overcome her nausea.

'Here comes your surprise,' Alphonsine tells her, poking her in the ribs with a sharp finger. 'Just you wait and see.'

The spectators open a way for three men dressed in black to come through. When they have mounted the scaffold, Leonora notices that the third man, who is very slight, bears a phenomenal resemblance to herself. He is carrying a basket of lilies.

'I can't bear to witness this,' she tells Alphonsine.

'Do you have something to say?' the executioner asks the squat and shortest man.

He leads him to the guillotine and places a cushion under his knees.

'Thank you,' is his only answer.

After one terse strike, the head tumbles into the basket of lilies, bathing them in blood. Leonora recognises her own head.

'Would you like a dead egg or a burnt foot?' she enquires of the

person seated beside her.

'A sugar lump.'

'I always bring sugar for my horses,' she answers.

16. THE LION OF BELFORT

IN FRANCE TELEGRAMS ARRIVE like little blue paper birds. '*Voici votre bleu*,' and the postman who looks like Cheval hands her a folded sheet of blue paper.

'Come to Paris,' it reads.

'I must leave immediately,' Leonora tells Alphonsine tremulously.

'It may well not even have come from him,' Alphonsine grumbles back. 'If I were you, I'd at least phone him to check.'

'Max never answers the phone. Help me pack and get to Orange in time to make the direct train.'

Once on board, the night is endless.

As soon as she arrives at the Rue Jacob, Max confirms to her: 'I am going to separate from Marie-Berthe. I no longer feel in the least bit sorry for her.'

There's no doubt about it, he is an arrogant man.

The shame that Max once reserved for his wife is being directed into his work. The working day lasts for ten uninterrupted hours. Leonora paints too, and writes. On the 17th January 1938, she joins him in working on two paintings — *What Shall We Do Tomorrow, Amelie?* and *The Silent Lover* — for the International Exhibition of Surrealist Art, now on show in Paris and due to travel to Amsterdam.

On entering the gallery, a young man hands each visitor in turn a lantern to illuminate the dark tunnel ahead.

'Is this an exhibition or a circus act?' asks the patron, Marie Laure de Noailles.

Sixteen mannequins lining both sides of the dark passage represent the Eternal Feminine. The lighting focuses on the erogenous zones of the women. Brilliantly highlighted, they magnetise and dazzle the spectators.

Each Surrealist has been issued with a mannequin and, since Ernst was used to causing a sensation, he has dressed his in black and raised her skirt above her suspender belt, to display her rose pink underwear. He has also inserted a brightly lit spotlight between her thighs. A vagrant with the face of the Lion of Belfort lies on the floor, pinning the newly made widow down by her feet and staring lasciviously upwards. He wears a glove on his right hand and rummages inside the mannequin's knickers. Even Breton exclaims:

'You have gone too far this time. At the very least, turn out the spotlight.'

Ernst's mannequin is a scandal. The photographers are fighting to get the best picture of it.

'I live with the Lion of Belfort,' says Leonora, showing off.

Max encourages her to write more. ‘You write splendidly. Your writing saves the two of us.’

Max illustrates *The House of Fear*, which she types out in French: a horse invites her to a party at the house of a woman who appears dressed in a cape of living bats, sewn together by their wings. The lady who owns the House of Fear proposes a competition to her guests, all of whom are horses:

‘You have to count backwards from one hundred to five as fast as you can. At the same time, you have to use your left front hoof to tap out the rhythm of the *Volga Boatmen’s Song,* then the *Marseillaise* with the right front hoof, and finally beat out *Where Are You, My Last Rose of Summer?* with your rear hooves. The contest lasts for twenty-five minutes, but …’

Leonora pauses.

‘Is that how it ends? Why do you interrupt the story just at that point?’

‘Because my dream ended the moment I saw the Lady of Fear.’

‘And who is the Lady of Fear?’

‘She is one of my apparitions.’

The Surrealists live in a whirlwind that breaks all the barriers. Is this really freedom? For years, Picasso’s private life has caused a scandal. Every time he appears on the street, in a café, at a gallery or the theatre he creates a spectacle. The same women he paints inflate and deflate at his side, and if they don’t manage to escape, they thunder like popped balloons, suddenly letting off air. Those who once gave themselves queenly airs and graces suddenly shrivel away. When Baudelaire called them adored tigers and indolent monsters, he cursed and condemned them to martyrdom. Rimbaud is another idol, dead by the time he was thirty-seven years old, a traitor to the cause and Verlaine’s lover, an arms trafficker addicted to absinthe and hashish.

Breton composes his manifestos and obliges others to sign them. Others go back on their word, and he throws them out on to the street. To him, Surrealism is a way of life. No Surrealist poet is permitted to sully himself by writing journalism. If he lacks the basic necessities of his subsistence, that is his own private drama which he must experience to the ultimate degree. Philippe Soupault was expelled for both his essays and his poetry, and so was the sociologist Pierre Naville, for being considered doctrinaire. Breton was not bothered by his decision to expel either Marcel Duchamp or the philosopher Georges Bataille, whom he branded an ‘excrementalist’; or André Masson, a follower of Sade, for alleging that all an artist needed to do was to dangle a pen over the page allowing it to make lines from which the best image can be formed; or Francis Picabia for aligning himself with Cubism; or Raymond Queneau, for being overly neo-

French. Georges Sadoul and Louis Aragon were kicked out for the crime of choosing to become Communists. Once outside the group the poet Aragon, with his bird-like profile, became the most miserable wretch among men.

Benjamin Péret arrived at the Rue Jacob in order to exhort Max to break with Paul Eluard: the order went out to sabotage his poetry.

'Breton believes himself to be the great incorruptible, and exercises a reign of terror in the name of Surrealist ethics,' Max announces, clearly angry. 'Eluard is my brother, I came to France because of him, he bought my first works and I owe him everything. In addition to all that he is a great poet, in sharp contrast to André.'

'Are you then not going to condemn him?'

'Most certainly I am not!'

Together with Paul Eluard and Man Ray, Max Ernst writes *The Man who Lost his Skeleton,* a diatribe against the Surrealist leader and his edicts.

Back in his room, Max is spinning the bicycle wheel he has attached to a circular bench. To him, no artist has anything in particular to boast of. At the end of the day, the source of art lies in the unconscious, and who has ever defined that with any degree of certainty? Reserved and ironic, he observes his colleagues furiously debating their ambitions, their nightmares, and their scandals.

The circle of admirers, detractors and collectors gathered around Breton and his followers is magnetic, and the painters are dependent on protectors and sponsors. In the art world, a patron is more important than a lover.

'I can't stand Paris any more,' Max says in despair, fed up with Breton, with in-fighting, with squabbles and all the surrealists' pettiness.

'Then we could leave,' Leonora encourages him.

When they arrive at St. Martin, the first thing they do is to hire some bikes. A bicycle is freedom. Pedalling along behind Max matches having an orgasm, for the way the wind fills her face and makes her hair wild. Sometimes Max dumps the bike, pushes Leonora into the trees and there, away from the road, takes her with all his strength. His body burns and sets fire to hers.

Once more they rent the room over Alphonsine's café: 'This morning I found another spider in your bedroom.'

17. ST. MARTIN D'ARDECHE

LEONORA AND MAX find an eighteenth-century farmhouse and set about making their imprint on the stone floor and the stone bed, against stone walls, the heat of the sun inflaming their ardour. Max, who once upon a time used to say: 'I have only ever experienced joy by rising to a challenge,' is now humbled by such happiness. His sense of intimacy is feline, he adores Leonora like a cat and he explores every millimetre of her body like a spider, licking her, distinguishing her every odour moving from the scent of her hair and her skin, tasting her mouth, tongue and tears.

'I am so absurdly happy, I am convinced that something horrible is going to happen,' Leonora tells him.

'So … what if we were to remain here for good?' Max suggests.

Leonora takes in a dog and a pregnant cat who gives birth to six kittens. She looks after them as if they were her own offspring. Max decides to sculpt them in stone, alongside a woman bearing a fish in her arms.

'My one desire is to live with Leonora for as long as the world permits,' Max writes to his son Jimmy.

The world is that of Marie-Berthe Aurenche, the Surrealists, and the ominous rumour of war.

'I am just about to set sail for the United States,' Jimmy replies.

In view of the threat of war, a great many young people are preparing to travel on board the *l'Amérique*.

Max goes to the village for cement and clay, speaks with the people there, seducing them as he seduces the friends who come to visit them here. His French is impeccable and the wine-makers assume he comes from Paris.

Leonora asks her mother for money and buys the house surrounded by vines weighed down with bunches of fruit.

'We can go ahead and make our own wine,' Leonora proposes.

'Yes, but we would need to grow more vines.' Max is becoming enthused.

Leonora informs Maurie that: 'An inscription over the door confirms that the house goes back to the eighteenth century.'

The peasants watch in astonishment as a Bentley saloon grandly descends the mountainside and a distinguished-looking woman descends from the car, leaning on the arm of her driver. The man then removes a number of leather suitcases from the boot, and Maurie heads towards the farm's historic front door. Max bows to kiss her hand in greeting. For the next three days they don't go out. Then one afternoon Leonora accompanies her mother into the countryside and

points out the vast extent of the surrounding vineyards. Maurie nods in agreement.

On the fourth day she departs once more, driven by her chauffeur, who had been put up in the village inn for three days without being able to satisfy the innkeeper's curiosity, since he doesn't speak a word of French.

Ernst fills the entire house with his immense presence. As a workman, he has fun mixing chalk and sand and sculpting a mermaid and a minotaur on the back-garden wall. Leonora paints a bird-lizard inside the door, and Ernst buys a wooden ladder to climb and construct his concrete sculptures: a faun and a sphinx; another mermaid with wings, her head crowned with a fish; horses with bird faces, gargoyles with crocodile jaws, dragons ensnaring calves. Leonora sculpts a horse's head, on which Max congratulates her.

'I wish you would sculpt more horses.'

The grand bas-relief on the outside wall depicts Loplop. A mosaic with a bat decorates the floor and is complemented by a sculpted bench. The peasants gather curiously to see what will be the next imaginary creature to emerge from the walls of the lovers' house.

'What is all this?' enquires Pierre, the grape-picker, at the sight of the sculptures.

Max explains: 'These are our guardian angels.'

'But they look more like devils.'

'Not at all. They are benevolent spirits put there for the protection of St. Martin d'Ardèche! We are beautifying all our walls and doors with our mythical beings!'

Pierre warms to Max. Leonora goes to and from the village shop hardly looking to right or left. She doesn't want to risk breaking the spell and finding out that none of it is true.

She is unaware they call her 'the Englishwoman'. Thanks to the postman they know where she comes from; he has noted the British stamps on the envelopes he regularly delivers to the farm. They know, too, that Englishwomen are free and easy, that nearly all have a screw loose, and that this one runs around in a state of undress. One midday some local inhabitants come upon them naked on the river bank. As the couple walked beside the river they had stripped off their shirts and trousers, and now, having flung themselves down on the hot pebbles, they say that the water is cold and burst out laughing, running around and splashing each other. They spend all their time in one another's arms, and their laughter echoes through the cobbled streets.

'They are Romeo and Juliet, and their drama can only end in tears,' says Aphonsine with ill humour, given that they now come to her café less often than before. Once upon a time, they would order

red wine by the litre, often one litre apiece, although sometimes they drank as many as three.

'Ever since the Middle Ages wine has been drunk in St. Martin d'Ardèche,' Max explains. 'Over in the Loire Valley, the future St. Martin had tied his donkey to a vine, while he made preparations for his journey, and Bourriquet nibbled some of the vine leaves. The following harvest the nibbled vine produced a bigger grape harvest. So from then on the peasants decided to spread the tale and carefully pruned back the vines.'

Leonora glories in the magical animals created by her painter and adds her plaster horse's head to their collection of sculptures.

'They are our saints, and are there to protect us from spurned wives, hostile fathers and bad-tempered Surrealists,' as Max explains when he meets Fonfon on a trip to the village to buy bread and wine.

They watch the sky at night. Ernst knows the firmament of the stars well, for he had closely followed discoveries of the comets made by his compatriot Tempel. And Leonora always recalls Father O'Connor, her personal astronomer, which amuses him.

To paint together is to make magic together. Leonora begins her painting *Loplop, the Superior Bird* and Max asks her to paint the background to *The Encounter*. In addition to the bas-relief, Max creates cypresses using Oscar Domínguez's technique of decalcomania. He applies black gouache to paper, then presses it hard against the canvas for as long as he feels like before lifting it off. His disciple tells him it looks like a sponge. Then he works on the imprints, using a finely tipped brush and retouching them until the cypresses — or other, still more unexpected — images emerge: perhaps the head of a bird, the right arm of a woman, a human body, or a wing.

'Look Leonora, take hold of the brush and you'll see how a forest grows for you too.'

'What is a forest made of?' Leonora asks.

'A supernatural insect.'

'What do forests do?'

'They never go to sleep early.'

'What does the summer mean to the forests?'

'It means changing leaves into words.'

Together they create a new type of botany, a green and disturbing microcosm, cerebral and vegetal at one and the same time. He paints *Un peu de calme* and makes a number of versions of *The Fascinating Cypress*. Cypress trees become his obsession. They unite sky and earth, and their roots excavate so deeply into the ground they disinter the origins of psychic concepts. At first Leonora describes them as the guardians of the cemetery, and now Max starts to divide them into solitary, mineral and conjugal types. One cypress may embrace

another:

'According to a Chinese legend, if you rub cypress resin on your heels, you can walk on water without sinking.'

He also recounts how, at the Front during the Great War, he would imagine the forest as people, and that forests that were bombed were sacrificed humans:

'You can't imagine how sad those landscapes were, Leonora. The tree trunks were left still standing upright but wounded, and not even the weight of winter snow could protect them. A tree destroyed is a soldier killed by human stupidity.'

It makes Leonora realise that the desolate landscape they are painting in unison is a rupture with everything she has ever previously seen.

The cypresses follow her, they proceed together, envelop her in their embrace, she is so slender and refined that they gather her into them. Even if Leonora starts to run, the nearest cypress pulls itself up out of the ground and follows her. Should she pause, the cypress does the same, and its branches tremble as if it were out of breath.

'Everything I do automatically becomes a forest,' Max tells her.

A new variant of natural history is born on his canvas: moss, lichen, lianas overwhelm it, and it is easy to observe how they heal ailments of the soul, for their leaves bloom inside you. Velvety moss takes up the space like a sickly and tenacious invader that finally becomes a plague.

'I refuse to submit to discipline,' avers Max.

His spirit of rebellion is so strong, his brushstrokes pour out his rage against militarism as a way of life. Four years spent in the cavalry artillery and he constantly remembers the sergeant major bawling out: 'No-one can take our goose step away from us!'

Max cradles nature and, when he tires of doing so, emerges to play bowls in the evening with the plumber and the carpenter who await him in the shade of the lime trees. Meanwhile, Leonora sets the table, and opens a bottle of wine so that at dinner time it will have reached the same temperature as her own blood.

Leonora works from morning till night like one possessed. Nothing escapes her. As well as painting together with Max, she poses in the early morning light in the garden for *Leonora dans la lumière du matin,* and when the sun shines in the middle of the sky, they both seek out the shade and she assists her lover in painting *Europe after the Rain* and *Swampangel.* Max can do anything he pleases. She is there as his anchor, the woman he calls *Tannhäuser.* Unwilling to be left behind, she types up her book on the Remington. It is *The Oval Lady* for which Max makes her engravings of *La Débutante, Pigeon Volé, The Fascinating Cypress,* and *The Robing of the Bride.*

There is a fire burning in Leonora's belly, and she has never known anything like it before.

'Is this love?'

Max replies that love is born of the desire for another person, and that Nietzche tells us: 'When we are in love, we have a tendency to endow the beloved with every perfection.'

'Then what happens when we come across an imperfection?'

'That's when falling-out-of-love comes in.'

What has happened to Marie-Berthe will never happen to Leonora.

18. THE GREAT INDIAN COCKROACH

LIFE IN ST. MARTIN is not without its mysteries. A young man beats a drum to announce that tonight the great Kaffir, famous the whole world over, and his medium, Olga, will disclose the secrets of the universe in the courtyard of the Hôtel du Centre, where their circus will be performing.

Leonora and Max watch the show through a rip in the canvas of the Big Top. 'We could do better than this' is their conclusion, and they suggest to Alphonsine that they provide a show in which a third member of the cast will participate: their friend Drusille, the spinster daughter of the owner of the castle at the top of the mountain.

'If someone in the village lends us a gramophone, we could do far better than this insipid session of mass hypnosis. I am going to paint my face and hair blue which will make me the great Indian cockroach, and Leonora shall dance on the tables while I perform a number of miracles with her.'

'What kind of miracles?'

'Firstly, the miracle of resuscitating her. Then I shall hypnotise the audience. Leonora, do you know the spell to hypnotise a wild panther? And Drusille's secret turn will leave everyone open-mouthed.'

'You know they say that this Drusille has a screw loose,' Fonfon protests. 'Don't let her go and break all my crockery. It's because her mother abandoned her, and her father — the Lord Viscount — sleeps all day and reads all night, locked inside the castle library.'

'Max has mastered Drusille,' responds Leonora. 'You don't need to worry about a thing.'

'And me, what I am meant to do?' asks Fonfon.

'You'll probably be asked to play the little dwarf. But put on your best dress, because today you are first of all going to be selling a large quantity of wine.' The order comes from Max.

He is proved right. Not much goes on in the little villages around here, and Max and Leonora are daily news from the minute they get out of bed: whether they walk hand in hand down the street to the river; decide to take a bicycle ride; or he takes her in his arms and kisses her in the middle of the bridge; even if they then buy cheese and a couple of bottles of wine … Of course the public will come in droves to bear witness to their miracles.

More and more people crowd into the café. Max is a terrific mime artist. Leonora's role is to play the patient, with Max as the surgeon. Leonora complains loudly, both her hands clutching her belly. Wrapped in a sheet, she lies down on the table, and Max transforms

the café into an operating theatre in which he slits her stomach open with a knife. Leonora screams with pain and from her intestines Dr. Ernst removes tomatoes, nails, a hammer, ears of corn, apples, chains, shoes, an alarm clock, aubergines and sausages, which he lifts to his lips and starts chomping, while displaying his findings to the festive audience. Finally, he pulls out a handful of little snakes, also from inside his patient's abdomen. Leonora, miraculously restored to health, leaps up from the operating table, landing lightly on her bare feet with one bound, and takes a bow to popular applause.

'Leonora, stand over here without moving,' Max instructs her, and the Englishwoman stops stock still, and lets fall the sheet that has been covering her, as the audience falls silent. No-one moves. Leonora is ethereal. Sometimes, nudity can take people's breath away.

This couple are original: no doubt about it. He, tall and aquiline, with a halo of sanctity encircling his white hair; she, tall and slim, with burning eyes, a woman ripe to the point of bursting. Her mass of black hair is filled with nesting birds. The rumour has gone round that Drusille, the mad daughter of the local viscount, is also going to perform, and the announcement stirs the morbid fascination of the local peasantry, who are sure they've seen her whipping her animals while naked.

The grand finale heightens the public's tension and inclination for another bottle of wine, while Drusille displays her charms and Ernst — his face running with blue paint — entertains the public, until a whistle from the kitchen prompts him to put a record on the gramophone, and Drusille makes her entrance dragging a terrified black goat. The Amazon is wearing a leather corset and thigh-high black boots. She opens with a Satanic dance, in which it is impossible to distinguish woman from goat. The petrified audience watches as the goat stands up on its hind legs. Then, in a desperate bid to escape, the billy goat frantically leaps onto the record player, which zooms over the heads of the spectators, before dragging the Viscountess of Guindre offstage on her tummy.

The audience overturn bottles, glasses, hats, chairs and start screaming in the midst of the chaos of broken bottles and upended chairs:

'I am the Harlequin of the fete,' shouts one, swaggering with his hips thrust forward.

'I am Blue Beard and I'm looking for a new wife,' announces a fat little fellow.

A woman swathed in a shawl proclaims: 'I am the Queen of England, and the proprietress of St. Martin d'Ardèche.'

Leonora disabuses her: 'You can't be the Queen, because I've seen her as plain as I am looking at you now.'

The woman at once stops laughing, and curtseys politely.

Pierre, the grape-picker, is dressed as a frock-coated dandy and raises his glass too high and too often to toast what's happening. He seizes Fonfon by the hands: 'You are no peasant, you have the fingers of a princess, and I shall present you with a diamond.'

He kneels and declares himself the Prime Minister of France.

'Where has the Viscountess gone?' asks old Mathieu.

The goat has also disappeared. The whole of St. Martin d'Ardèche is playing at role reversal, safe in the knowledge that tomorrow everything will be back to normal.

'They liberate their unconscious, performing Quasimodo in a fete of lunatics,' Max seeks to calm Leonora, who can't see the Satanic Amazon, still less her goat, anywhere at all. 'Don't worry,' Max whispers to her, 'tomorrow the locals will all return to the vineyards, the river, the white rocks or their aubergines, or to shooting the rabbits you see fleeing with their ears down. As for Drusille, only a moment ago, I heard the gallop of her horse on the bridge, and she must by now have reached the final slope leading up to her castle.'

On the wood-fired stove, Leonora is putting plums, peaches and quinces on to boil.

'We shall gorge on fruit each evening in honour of Aphrodite,' Max tells her.

Leonora rushes between the vineyards and the kitchen, from her easel to the store cupboard.

'I am an ant among the cicadas.'

The kitchen becomes central to the expression of their love. Eating restores their energy, only for them to resume their love-making with renewed vigour. Leonora knows that the house is her body; its walls are her bones; its roof, her head; its kitchen, her liver, her blood and her heart. Its walls embrace her, and she caresses them in return as she climbs the stairs, places a sack of potatoes in its proper corner, or opens the windows to admit the morning.

Leonor Fini arrives from Paris with André Pieyre de Mandriargues and a heavy suitcase. They install themselves in the bedroom on the second floor, which they take over with their extravagant clothes. If it weren't for her baby face, Leonora would get rid of the Argentine and her interminable monologues on the Marquis de Sade. She can speak French only by purring in a strong Spanish or Buenos Aires accent, and irrationally pursues her every whim: 'I can't take a bath, the soap just escaped through the window.'

According to Leonor, her mere presence is a guarantee that objects will start rebelling against their natural function. Just as the soap vanished, so Max's bicycle was found one morning without wheels, and a full saucepan of water evaporated before the stove was

lit, while not a single cushion was left with its feather stuffing intact.

'Why didn't you put any sheets on their bed?' Max complains to Leonora.

'Of course I made up the bed with fresh sheets,' Leonora answers indignantly, and Fini chuckles with pleasure at what she has done.

'They are the sails for my boat, and I took them up on the roof to see if they would billow in the wind.'

Just like Leonora and Max, Leonor also climbs up on to the flat part of the roof to sunbathe naked.

'These Parisians always enjoy playing at Adam and Eve,' the locals comment.

André Pieyre de Mandriargues writes seated in the lotus position, and fetes Fini's extravagances, which cause him such intense emotion that he begins to stammer. Leonora asks him what he's doing, and he answers that he's reading erotic literature written by birds in the sky. Meanwhile he constantly repeats the mantra: 'What time are we going to eat?' Leonor Fini becomes the cats' guardian as there are now eight of them consuming numerous litres of milk a day, despite Leonora warning her that they should only be served it mixed with water.

'Why don't we buy a cow, and keep her in the garden?' suggests Leonor Fini.

'Listen, we're not living in the Pampas here,' Max protests.

'This place is ideal for painting watercolours,' announces the Argentine, and takes possession of the kitchen table. 'Look, Leonora, the watercolour does exactly what it wants. You only need to follow the course of painting through water, and you reach its source all on its own, and it takes you where it will, until the most unexpected thing occurs, far more beautiful than anything you'd hoped for.'

Fini takes up all the space, sets up an easel in one room, then abandons working on canvas in favour of returning to making her watercolours on paper.

'We're going to eat now, you need to move your things,' Leonora pleads with her.

'I want to paint you, Leonora, inside the house, so as not to compete with Max, who has painted your portrait in the jungle outside.'

Leonora finds Leonor's unpredictability endearing. Despite the fact she has exhibited with the Surrealists, she is not one of them. 'I am me.' She is almost repeating the words of Jehovah to Moses when He tells him: 'I am that I am.' She declares Leonora a true revolutionary, and paints her portrait as half woman, half man, like a mysterious Joan of Arc from antiquity, her breast covered by a bronze breast-plate. Here, in *The Alcove, an interior with three women*, Leonora is foregrounded, while two more women, naked and holding hands,

barely stand out from the sombre background.

'I look like a medieval statue.'

André Pieyre de Mandriargues also becomes attached to going about in the nude and plans on going down to the river stark naked.

'You can strip off when you get there,' says Max.

'Nobody will notice, I'll go on Leonora's bicycle.'

'André, these French provincials are extremely conservative …'

In the kitchen, the two Leonoras lean over their bubbling saucepans, into which they throw garden herbs, hairs of the eight cats, locks of their own hair, mushrooms and flowers, all of which Leonora then serves up, dressed in her embroidered white blouse and a fringed shawl with little bells around the edges borrowed from Fini's wardrobe. In their corner of the room, the potatoes wait in their sack on the floor. From the garden the Englishwoman brings in lettuces she calls 'my lettuces', and carrots that she also considers to be her own, but what most delight her are the heavy dark purple globes slowly expanding in the midst of their spiky leaves: aubergines.

'You don't know what it's like to grow tomatoes on your own land, cut them through the middle, and bite into them.'

'Is it like an orgasm?' Fini asks her.

With her fingers, Leonora skins horse mackerels, shucks beans and shells lentils. Her hands are more than adroit: they are also wise. They race back and forth without once erring, not when they cut the tops off the corn cobs, nor when they slice carrots into neat rings.

'No-one peels potatoes like you do. How come you're so dextrous?' André asks her.

'Because I use both hemispheres of my brain.'

This dexterity has never been as much cause of wonder and rumination as now. Harold and Maurie complied with the nuns. André and Leonor Fini rejoice in Leonora's exceptional faculties.

André Pieyre de Mandriargues cracks open a walnut: 'This is what your brain looks like, Leonora.'

'No, mine extends and extends until it pierces the celestial dome. Owning a telescope without its complement, the microscope, is a symbol of the most wilful incomprehension. The task of the right eye is to look through the telescope, while the left eye peers into the microscope.'

'Cartier-Bresson awaits us in Paris,' trumpets Fini, 'but before we leave, I need to satisfy my curiosity. Max, what is it you like to do best in life?'

'To look.'

As they are on the point of leaving, Max paints his 'lover of the wind', and gives the finishing brushstrokes to *La Toilette de la Mariée,* which shows Leonora in the nude. Moss again invades the canvas, a

dense vegetation that presses upon leaves and mist and interweaves them into minuscule organisms. *Leonora in the Morning Light* palpitates, its green that of primitive cells at the origin of all life. A goddess arises among branches and vine leaves, flanked by a unicorn and a minotaur, a celestial creature and a lover of the wind who might have been happy, had a heavy teardrop not left a damp blot on the sleeve of her dress, or a tiny skeleton weren't dancing right before her eyes.

The Surrealists call Ernst 'the superior bird', and in tribute Leonora paints him with a large feathered cape rising to a collar of fishes. Behind the bird — fish emerges a frozen horse's head — or could it be that of a mare? Again, in her short story, 'Pigeon Fly', Leonora describes an older man who wears striped socks and an overcoat of feathers.

When Leonora cannot express what she wants in her paintings, she writes it down instead. Her lover encourages her.

'If Remington rhymes with Carrington, your father must have been a typewriter.'

'He was a machine that produced Nos: no, no, no, no don't, no you can't, no you mustn't.'

Leonora is typing insistently on the same dining table from which she had obliged Leonor Fini to remove her watercolours.

Agatha, her protagonist, is experiencing a profound repugnance towards her husband, Celestin, who is gradually changing into a bird. In the meantime, she is becoming so obliterated that she can hardly see herself in the mirror any more. Her husband, mired in his egotism, pays her no attention. She writes: 'Celestin came and saw nothing at all. He touched my face with his soft hands, hands that really are too soft.' Yes, Max's hands are too soft and there are times when Leonora would like to bite them.

In the village café, all the talk is of war, and Alphonsine is continually irritable.

'Pétain, the hero of Verdun, will know how to defend us. He is a supreme strategist.'

In spite of their faith in the Maginot Line, the terrified peasants confer among themselves. Only Max and Leonora persist in dedicating themselves exclusively to their love.

'Those two can't see beyond the ends of their noses,' Pierre says, as he passes the front of their house to take another look at the sculptures. 'They make their puppets or doodle their pictures and are oblivious to everything else.'

Max remembers: 'Before the defeat of the Republicans in Spain, I painted *L'Ange du Foyer*. Of course the title is ironic, a gob of spit in the face of a twisted idiot, a monster flying over the earth,

annihilating all in its path: the monster of Nazism.'

'And the terrifying lizard in the monster's tail?'

'That's its creator. You bear your own lizard within yourself, and if you fail to identify with all your creations — or your creatures — you'll never become a great artist, Leonora.'

'The second monster I have known is you, and the first was my father. Your picture anticipated what would occur in Spain, and it is now happening across the whole world.'

Leonora renews her sisterhood with nature, as she used to when she was a child. The birds whose singing drowns out all else scarcely fly over the village any more. The peasants tend their vineyards like a favourite child, and Leonora is moved by their actions. For them, wine is the antidote to illness and infection: it cleanses the veins and helps the blood to circulate. They talk about Château Latour.

'If the Germans come, I'll bury my best bottles.'

'In my case, wine is what penetrates my very soul.'

'And in mine, my very heart.'

Leonora shares their devotion to the vines, and always carries a pair of heavy grape scissors in her apron pocket. Pruning is a splendid task, as splendid as the vineyard workers' conversation. 'Wine ages slowly, and the more slowly it ages, the more noble it becomes.' 'I grow older like a fine wine, because I improve with the years.' 'The wine reveals that our land has been here for ages before us, and will still be here long after we are gone.' 'Thanks to our wine, we have survived wars. Wine is what makes French people French. Their spirit derives from their wine.'

'If it goes on raining, we are going to lose the harvest.' Pierre the grape-picker raises his eyes to the heavens. 'We shall have to get the harvest in before the Germans arrive and the vineyards become battlegrounds.'

The message goes round from one community to the next: 'The fine wines have to be hidden. No Boche is going to get his hands on my vintage 1932.'

19. WAR

NOTHING TROUBLES LEONORA. Max and she are not man and woman, but bird and mare.

'How oblivious you are, Max!' Roland tells Max when he pays them a visit with Lee Miller. 'The whole of France is talking about how imminent war is, and all you do is paint.'

It is extraordinary that Max, who suffered the devastations of the Great War, does not recognise what a risk he runs, being a German in France at this point in time.

'You have to leave now, immediately.'

'No, there's no danger here,' replies Max, irritated by all the letters written in alarm, including some from his son, Jimmy. 'The French regard me as one of them. I am more French than German.'

In fact he is in so much danger that two gendarmes march him off to the concentration camp of L'Argentière, just outside St. Martin d'Ardèche, with a hundred other Germans. The foreigners are to be kept there under surveillance until further notice, all the more strictly if they happen to be Germans. To be held in custody means interminable waiting behind barbed wire. Leonora, being English, is not at risk. France and England are allies.

Leonora rents a room in L'Argentière and every noon brings Max food to eat, and puts fresh clothes and tubes of paint in his hands. She even obtains permission to accompany him on his walks inside the camp. She comes every day without fail, although the bread, milk and vegetables she brings grow steadily worse, both their quality and quantity severely reduced by rationing. Hans Bellmer, a fellow prisoner, comments on her assiduousness to Max, who seems to find it entirely natural that the Englishwoman should be there at his service.

Bellmer encourages Max to resume making decalcomanias. Neither the camp officials nor the soldiers used as prison guards are bothered by the two men painting pictures out in the prison yard. Max is nervous and depressed, and begs Leonora to go to Paris and speak to Eluard, to stir up their friends and the authorities, to request an appointment with the President of the Republic, or to run to the Archbishop and persuade him to knock at the heavenly gates to tug at the angels' wings.

'I shall obtain your freedom,' she assures him, with blazing eyes.

'Then it had better be soon, since I doubt whether I shall last long in here.'

Leonora goes to Paris and seeks out Eluard: 'You alone can approach the President of the Republic.'

Eluard puts pen to paper and writes to Albert Lebrun: 'Max Ernst

is one of the most outstanding and respected painters of the School of Paris. He is considered a Frenchman and was the first German artist to be exhibited at a salon in this country. He has lived twenty of his fifty years in France. Sincere, candid, correct, proud and loyal, he is my dearest friend. If you knew him you would understand at once that his imprisonment is unjust. He has restored a house in a village near Montpellier, the peasants there care for him, he cultivates his vineyards, and you need to grant him leave to return to St. Martin d'Ardèche. I would put my hand in the fire for him.'

Marie-Berthe Aurenche is also busily calling on Senator Albert Sarraut. For whatever reason, Max is transferred to a camp at Les Milles, near to Aix-en-Provence, at a former brick factory where red dust infiltrates even the food rations, now still further reduced. The latrines are disgusting and their pestilence extends through the camp, where many prisoners contract dysentery. Once at midday and once in the evening, the captives queue up while a soldier dumps a ladle of food on their plates. Some of the German students interned by the French are treated as criminals. France, which once so loved them, now persecutes them.

'I can demonstrate that I am anti-Nazi,' Max insists. 'That is precisely the reason I am here in France.'

Once again, the two painters are allowed out to paint in the yard, following another petition from Bellmer, the Polish Jew. He paints Max's portrait in profile, composed of Les Milles' red bricks, against a black background. Bellmer is in better spirits than Max and challenges him to paint. It seems as if creating so many of his mutilated dolls may have hardened him.

'Anyone may paint anywhere, provided their family can bring them the materials to work with.'

They stay out in the yard all day. Max paints *Alice in 39,* a little picture in the style of a Russian Orthodox icon. In it, he revisits Leonora among the trees.

They are deporting Jews back to Germany from the camp at Les Milles, and the French authorities now inform Bellmer and Ernst that they are to be removed to North Africa, to work at laying railway lines.

In November 1939, and in desperation, Max sends a card to Jimmy, his son in New York. He reminds him that his father is interned in a concentration camp at Les Milles. Surely he can use his contacts to assist in liberating him from his imminent fate? 'Do something. Approach important people who can be of help.'

He emerges free at Christmas-time, and spends the winter snowed in at St. Martin d'Ardèche with Leonora. It is a novel experience for them both, not only because of the snow, but because the peasants

who had once believed he was French now know him to be German, and when the couple go into the village, only Alphonsine opens her arms to him.

'Whatever happens, I still need to explore the limits of my mind,' Max says.

'While you still have the time … ever since I've been with you, I've developed a sense of danger I never had before.'

'I feel just as you do. I go from one extreme mental state to another, and each time I become more conscious of what awaits me.'

Leonora conceals from Max that when she went to Paris she ambushed Marie-Berthe and gave her a pummelling she still thinks of fondly.

'What about Hans Bellmer, Max?'

'He must have got out a few days after me.'

'Are you sure about that?'

'No.'

Someone in the village denounces Max, and the gendarme presents himself at the door again.

'You are a German and as of now are under arrest.'

'Leonora, calm down! Speak to our friends. They have already let me out once.'

'Sit down and control yourself, Madame,' the policeman orders Leonora, who is trembling so much her teeth are chattering.

The terror in her eyes fills the entire room.

'Your husband is not the only one,' the gendarme explains. 'The concentration camp is now full to bursting. The order has been given to hold all foreigners under control. They are all to be deported.'

It doesn't even occur to Max to embrace her. He stares straight ahead until the policeman handcuffs him, takes him by the arm, and leads him away.

No sooner have they gone than Leonora throws herself on top of the heap of potatoes. It disintegrates under her weight, scattering potatoes across the kitchen's tiled floor. She doesn't pick them up because her tears prevent her from seeing clearly. Instead, she goes down to the village and drinks several glasses of *marc*. When Alphonsine finally lets her know it is closing time, she returns home. She downs a bottle of Eau de Cologne, and spends the whole night vomiting, in the hope that the spasms wracking her body will lessen the pain of her suffering. When dawn breaks, she reaches a decision: 'I need to start moving. The only way of surviving this is to get to work.'

With no food in her stomach and without a hat on her head, she goes down to the vines and cuts off one bunch of grapes at a time, until the sun scorches and puts a crick in her neck. Despite her best efforts, Max's absence consumes her. When she returns home, she

bends over the lavatory and puts her fingers down her throat. She tries to vomit, but nothing comes up, her throat is a raw red ember, her chest burns, her whole body shakes. She goes up and down stairs from bedroom to kitchen and finally lies down on the mound of potatoes.

For the whole of the next week she eats boiled potatoes, one or often only half at a time. She has never been possessed of such strength in her life. She rises with the sun, and goes to bed when it sets. In the morning, she leaps out of bed before bad thoughts assail her, and, as she sleeps in her clothes, she runs straight out to attend to her vines. Sweat pours off her, the nape of her neck is permanently dripping. 'I am set on total purification!' she tells herself, and doesn't budge until she sees the sun set over the horizon. Every time a memory of Max drifts across her thoughts, she makes an effort of will to exclude it from her mind. Better to think only of a potato, all of life a potato. 'Maybe I could go to the village and buy some butter, then bake myself a potato in the oven this evening.' Sometimes she feels reflective: 'I never knew that wine, as well as a stimulant, was such good nourishment, it keeps my strength up.' On Sundays she takes her clothes off and sunbathes on the flat roof, stretched out like a lizard, before downing a full bottle of wine. Every night she downs another. Wine is extraordinary, and provides the best of therapies.

The feast day of Saint John is drawing near. Leonora goes to the village to buy butter.

'What a strange war!' the villagers in the dairy are saying.

In Paris they call it *la drôle de guerre*, and relate how in Holland the children wave at the Luftwaffe planes and laugh out loud. How can they understand that the Germans are now their enemies? In the Polish countryside, farm labourers and women with colourful scarves on their heads carry on working as if nothing had happened. A whole group of Belgians have arrived in the village. During the Great War, the Germans raped their country: Belgium has become the symbol of German treachery. They sank the *Lusitania*. In Paris, all the cafés are full. The French are having a good time, disregarding Poland's tragedy. An invasion? Fonfon is not to be seen. Ever since the gendarme took Max away, she hasn't been seen anywhere other than in her café, when she comes over to serve Leonora another glass of *marc*. In the dairy, the owner can barely manage to be civil; and he used always to pay her court for being so beautiful. He asks her if the butter is for snails.

'It seems as though someone came to your house in the night and robbed you of your snails.'

'My what?'

'Be careful, they say that you're a spy. You could be denounced.'

‘Are you going to bring a lantern and hunt me down like the snails?’ Leonora asks.

The Englishwoman isn’t afraid of the war. She just wants Max back.

At night she closes her eyes against her filthy pillow of potatoes, and repeats the phrase that she introduced several days ago and now utters with absolute certainty: ‘I am not fated to die here.’

That was how, on 24th June 1940, Catherine Yarrow, an old friend of Leonora’s, finds her. Catherine, who is tall, slim and British, arrives with Michel Lukacs, her ungainly lover.

‘Leonora, these are bad times. I don’t think you can stay here.’

Leonora scarcely hears her:

‘I’ll go to the kitchen garden and pick a lettuce, I want to make a big salad for you both, and I have olives, tomatoes, olive oil. It’ll be a kind of Salade Niçoise, or almost a Niçoise, and I have some aubergines too.’

She returns from the vegetable plot covered in mud. She has fallen over. And her arms are empty.

‘What on earth did I go down to the kitchen garden to bring? You two are going to be staying here, aren’t you? I’ll sleep in the kitchen so I can hear if anyone knocks at the door, and the potatoes can be my pillow.’

Catherine looks at her fiancé in alarm. Then she looks back at Leonora, busy lighting a new cigarette from the last, chain-smoking so hurriedly that at one moment it seems she might in fact burn her face.

‘Max will be here at any moment,’ she announces. A sudden flash of terror streaks across her black eyes.

To be mad is to pace up and down without knowing why or what for, and getting lost along the way. ‘It is to wander into the unknown with the abandon and the values of the ignorant.’

‘Leonora, you have to get out of France; the Germans are everywhere. Max isn’t coming back, we’ve no idea when war will be over, nor when they might release him. You have to leave now with us!’

‘Max won’t be long, he went to the Pont Saint Esprit but, as the Rhône has flooded, he’s been delayed on the way back. Let’s open a bottle of the red. Although I do also have some white wine, if you prefer.’ She covers her face with her hands. ‘Max will be coming back. I am waiting here for him.’

‘You need to eat something more substantial. You are all skin and bones.’

Thanks to the arrival of Catherine and Michel, Leonora is obliged to exchange the potatoes for some nourishing soup, and now spends less time under the burning sun.

The creative and original Catherine has spent her life in the hands of psychiatrists, and analyses whatever comes before her eyes. Among her words of advice, those that most catch Leonora's attention are: 'You need to find yourself a new lover.'

Who might that be? Pierre the grape-picker? Old Mathieu who never does anything except noisily clear his throat?

'Wipe that painter out of your life; you're still looking for a father figure in him, and you're punishing yourself.'

'I am absolutely fine and in love with Max.'

'No you are not fine. You have never been in such a bad state in all the time I have known you. Do your parents know what state you are in?'

'I don't have any parents.'

'Of course you do, and they're worried about you. They loathe Max, and they've fallen out with you, and despite all that they still continue to maintain you. Your mother has even gone so far as to buy you this house.'

The day they venture into the village, Leonora sits herself down at a table with two lean and athletic Belgians.

'I am going to seduce them,' she informs Catherine. 'Your little chat has revived all my sexual desires. I haven't made love since they came to take Max away.'

But the young men are more concerned with war than with love, and with what the Nazis have done to their country. This young woman with the unkempt hair and fiery eyes is not in her right mind. They rise and leave her alone at the table.

'I shall have to remain painfully chaste,' concludes Leonora, with resignation.

She drinks too much wine and Alphonsine has no choice but to send her to bed, to sleep it off there at the café.

On another occasion, as if out of nowhere, Leonora tells Fonfon:

'I dreamt of two wolves and a fox.'

'Speak with wolves and they turn into lambs.'

'Even if they are German wolves?'

'Leonora, you are teetering on the edge of a precipice. Why don't you go and find Drusille de Guindre? They say you can see her standing alone at the window because her father no longer lets her out. The viscount has his own extensive sphere of influence; Drusille has been asking after you; and there's no doubt that they would help you.'

Leonora returns to her vineyards. She catches sunburn and sweats to such a point that Catherine comes to find her, and tries out yet another of her psychoanalytic approaches.

'Love is a transitory psychosis. In addition, St. Martin is a

dangerous place. You can't stay here on your own. We are going to get you out of here with us.'

'I am waiting here for Max, and it's impossible for me to leave without him. I will not move from this house.'

'Who knows when they might let him go? And you need to leave now, with us. I've heard tell that the Germans are raping the women they find alone.'

'That doesn't frighten me, Catherine. Who knows, I might even enjoy it. What makes me panic is the thought of robots, beings without brains. The Germans don't have blood in their veins, they have lead, the lead of bullets. Tomorrow I'll go back to the village, and see what I can find out. Surely someone will listen to me.'

'Nobody here would as much as throw you a rope to save you from drowning. Look at yourself, you look a fright: you haven't bathed or brushed your hair and you scare people away. Hurry up, and I'll help you pack your case.'

'Ever since my lover left, I've lost track of the date or the day of the week, and the only thing I know is that I have to stay here and wait for him.'

'You use Max as an instrument of self-castigation. He is nothing more than a father substitute for Harold Carrington. In any case, you're drinking like a fish.'

'Baudelaire said that one has to drink without stopping and to live life drunk, so I am following his advice. When I drink I don't notice the days go by.'

Catherine takes pity on her.

'If you don't want to leave, I'll stay with you; but if we stay here in this house, the same gendarme who took your lover away will come for us. Michel is Hungarian, and if the Germans find him here, they'll lock him up too. But I am not going to abandon you. You're in danger and so are we all. Once in Madrid, you can get hold of a visa for Max. Here, you're no use to him at all.'

Catherine, the therapist, needs to save her friend, and so makes herself answerable for her future.

'You need to understand what I'm saying to you: free yourself from Max just as you did from your father.'

Michel interrupts: 'Spain is our salvation.'

20. FLIGHT

EVERY TIME SHE THINKS of Max, Leonora doubles up as if thumped in the solar plexus. She keeps her passport next to his; she will obtain a visa for him. Why didn't she think of this before? Spain is the chance of a new life for her and Max together.

In Bourg-Saint-Andéol the gendarmes deny them permission to travel on.

'Come back tomorrow, or go to the Town Hall and see what the officials there have to say to you.'

Their indifference has become insulting.

'Whatever happens, we are going to leave now,' Leonora shouts, sitting in her Fiat. 'Now, this very minute! I am going to tell Fonfon and all the villagers that we are about to leave.'

'What shall we do with the house?' Caroline is worried. 'We need to close it up.'

'The people here are honest; you can put it in the care of any one of them. I think I'll leave the key with the man who owns the *Motel des Touristes* in St. Martin.'

In the *Motel des Touristes*, the only person they can find is Rose Vigne, wife of the hotelier.

'Don't worry about it. All we need to do is to go and see the notary. It'll only take about ten minutes,' she tells them.

At the notary's, Leonora grows increasingly uneasy.

'Sign,' the hotelier's wife orders her, categorically. 'I shall take full responsibility for the house.'

Leonora signs the transfer of ownership for her house and all her possessions to the motel owner.

Pierre, the grape-picker, arrives while Leonora is still living at the farm.

'The situation has changed. The Boches are now on the streets of Sedan, and you can cut the fear in the atmosphere with a knife.'

Leonora abandons the cats, dogs, vines, sculpted figurines; the shawl with its fringe of little bells, Max's paintings and hers too; she forgets about the books, and the album into which she has begun to stick photographs. All her willpower is focused on Spain and on obtaining Max's visa.

While Catherine Yarrow packs up the kitchen and hangs the saucepans back on the walls, Leonora spends the night packing and repacking her suitcase from Brooks Leather, and which bears her name next to a plate with the one-word logo: 'Revelation'.

'I am sure this word is a message from the Cosmos.'

At five in the morning, when she shuts the case and prepares to

sleep, she hears Catherine's voice:

'Leonora are you ready?'

The sculptures ranged along the walls watch their departure impassively. Nor could Leonora succeed in moving an equally uninterested Rose Vigne, the hotelier's wife, when she went to bid her farewell and entrust the house to her:

'Look after it well, it is our home, and we'll be coming back. I am this house, it means my life to me.'

Catherine seats herself behind the steering wheel, with Michel next to the window. Scarcely has she started up the engine, than the Englishwoman transforms herself into the Fiat. Tense to the ultimate limit of every muscle, she never takes her eyes off the road, and she is possessed of the strength of an engine. When her friend accelerates, Leonora's right foot also presses down on the floor. Twenty kilometres outside St. Martin d'Ardèche, the clutch locks and Leonora announces: 'I did that.'

'What do you mean you did it? How could you have?' Catherine is growing increasingly irritated.

'Because I can move the energy of the Earth, I radiate a magnetic force I never imagined possible. It was I who gave the car the order.'

Astonished by her own power, she blames herself for the stuck clutch: she is the car, the battery, *the clutch*, the steering wheel and the radiator.

'Well, if you're so all-powerful, you'd better fix it quickly, because here come the Nazis.'

'My solar system will give the order to the Fiat, and the clutch will come unstuck again.'

The car at once resumes functioning, without anyone having the least idea how.

The journey is sheer hell, because Catherine and Michel's patience has reached its limit. Catherine beseeches Leonora to keep quiet, and not to make their life impossible.

The woman riding in the back seat of their car is transparent and dishevelled, with wild hair and special powers: she orchestrates the inner workings of the world, arranges the patterns of traffic, has the capacity to stop the car in its tracks; she is a woman responsible for the rising of the sun and with the authority to end the war. She hates the Germans, and winds down her window and yells, with all the force of her lungs: 'Hitler must die!' Catherine winds the window back up. The pitch black night does nothing to impede Leonora's vision and, every time they encounter another car, she shouts: 'Hitler is a murderer!' Then she sits back down on her seat, shuts her eyes, and reopens them to stare at rows of coffins lining the road. Obviously they belong to French citizens massacred by the Nazis. The violence of

the war seeps into her every pore. She sees piles of corpses stacked in military lorries, their arms and legs dangling. Catherine and Michel either can't or don't want to see them. Leonora winds the window down once more and yells: 'The Germans are murdering France, the whole place stinks of death!' In this case, she happens to be right, since Perpignan is the site of a vast military cemetery.

'We are going to stop here and sleep for a few hours,' says Michel. But not one hotel has a single free room.

Leonora gets out of the car, and asks where the Nazis are. She stops the waiters, the shoe-shine boy and the postman, intimidating them by her tone of authority and the madness lurking in her black eyes.

One of them eventually answers her: 'The Germans have gone through France like a knife through butter.'

Another then confirms: 'I saw them come in. Riding their motorbikes with the sun reflected in their sunglasses. There's no room for even one more person in Bordeaux.'

Leonora always gets herself noticed and in occupied territory it is risky to stand out.

'Get back into the car and we'll be off, Leonora,' orders Catherine.

Leonora's anxiety grows in relation to their southward progress. She is trembling like a leaf except when she is yelling, or talking loudly to herself. It is quite impossible to control her. The main roads, overflowing with people in flight, have become impassable. The sound of car engines revving is constant and drills into their eardrums.

'What about all these people? Do they know where they are heading?' Leonora asks.

'Of course they don't!' Catherine yells back at her. 'We are all fleeing. The Germans have bombed France, or perhaps you haven't noticed?'

Leonora proclaims she has reached the only possible decision under the circumstances: to kill Hitler. Catherine shuts the window, and Leonora immediately opens it again:

'There's nothing worse than to invade another country and all soldiers are pieces of shit!'

Catherine winds up the window again. With hitherto unknown strength, Leonora winds it down again:

'Down with the invaders! Long live Free France!'

'Shut up!' Catherine tells her.

'If I tell all these people that I can hold back the war with the power of my mind, then the war will be over, and if I tell them I have psychic powers, they will stop being afraid; lots of people tell me that my eyes have a power in them, so if I confront the Nazis, they are bound to understand that they have to get out of the country.'

‘I really can’t cope with you any more,’ Catherine is imploring her with tears in her eyes. ‘Please stop yelling, you will end up giving us all away, and Michel doesn’t have any papers.’

‘But you are my responsibility, and I am in the process of saving you,’ Leonora protests.

She goes back to repeating to anyone with ears to listen that she is Joan of Arc.

‘If you want us to get to Andorra, don’t say another word. If you do, everything will fall apart, things are getting too serious, Leonora, and our lives are at stake.’

‘Would you like me to slip into a voluntary coma?’ Leonora sits rigidly and bites her lip until it runs with blood.

Catherine and Michel cannot begin to relax until they have reached Andorra, a country the size of a bread crumb that has fallen by chance between France and Spain.

On getting out of the Fiat, Leonora can no longer straighten her back.

She has lost control of her movements, and advances sideways like a crab. She attempts to climb the hotel staircase, and her legs trip her up. Catherine becomes annoyed again.

‘It’s just that my body won’t obey the orders given by my brain. I need to erase all I’ve learnt in order to eliminate the old formulas causing this paralysis of anxiety.’

‘What’s really happening is that you are going to stuff us all.’

Once inside the Hôtel de France, the only employee is a young girl who hands them the key to a room at the end of one corridor, then another to one on the second floor.

‘You are the only guests,’ she explains in Catalan.

In the hall to the empty hotel, Leonora takes a few hesitant steps and attempts to straighten up. Michel and Catherine, utterly fed up with her, shut themselves away in their room. Every man for himself, they decide. If the Englishwoman wants to be shot of life, that’s her business, but for the time being she still needs them to save her. Leonora eventually gets into her room on the second floor, opens her window and, two by two, a line of unusually tall pine trees advances on her.

After the first night Michel, in a somewhat improved mood, tells her he is going to the post office to send a telegram. The Englishwoman is unaware that it is to her father, who has sent some money out from England. Within a few days, his emissary is due to arrive in Andorra: he is a Jesuit who will obtain their visas to cross into Spain. The power of Imperial Chemical is immeasurable.

Leonora manages to stand up and to walk but, when she tries to walk up the slope behind the hotel, she seizes up like Catherine’s Fiat,

and is unable to straighten herself up.

'I can't believe you're doing this to us. Stand up straight,' and Catherine attempts to lift her up.

'I can't.'

'Stand up properly, I tell you!'

'I swear to you I can't!'

'Why on earth not?'

'Because of my impotence in the face of the suffering I saw on the main road as we came here.'

Anguish prevents her from coordinating her mind and body. Not one intended action can reach its logical completion, she is asphyxiated by anxiety and can't move a single finger on her right hand, nor on her left: all this affliction is borne by a woman who can write and paint using both cerebral hemispheres. Her mouth has become twisted, and it makes her embarrassed to speak. She attempts to understand why her body won't take orders, and decides it is because it is in rebellion. As her will is rendered powerless, her first recourse is to seek an accord with nature, starting with this wooded hill she is trying in vain to scale.

'Mountain, help me, please don't send me away, make me walk again! If I could only walk, I should be saved!'

She takes a couple of steps and falls to the floor.

'They have emptied my mind, and the only thing left imprinted on my memory is the image of the Germans mounted on their motorcycles, with the sun shining on their black goggles!'

A barking dog returns her to reality, and she drags herself back to the hotel.

But she can't sleep at all, and can hardly manage to eat.

Leonora takes refuge in the discipline she has inherited from her parents, and each morning strives to walk, whatever the cost.

'Dear Mountain, I want us to reach an agreement: please grant that my mind and body are united with you.'

She lies face downwards, her head buried in the grass.

'The earth absorbs me, the earth desires to communicate its strength to me.'

She raises herself up onto all fours, leaning heavily on her elbows, lengthening first her left leg, and then the right, scraping her elbows. At long last she straightens herself up and stands erect. Little by little, with huge effort, she takes a little step, then another, and finally trusts that she will be able to walk once more.

'Tomorrow I shall try again.'

Catherine and Michel want nothing more to do with her.

'This woman is wrecking all our lives,' Michel says.

'She has become a burden on me, too. Once I have been able to

hand her over, I shall never see her again.'

On bumping into her one morning at the hotel entrance, Catherine enquires:

'Is the crab going out today, then?'

After ten days of submitting herself to training, Leonora succeeds in climbing the hill. She slips and falls, but no matter: she has recovered the use of her legs.

'I have never before had such power and control over my own body,' she tells Catherine and Michel, who make fun of her.

Leonora is not conscious of the effect her behaviour has on others, nor of how strange she must appear. Catherine and Michel pretend not to know her and go out for walks alone. Sometimes, by way of compromise, she follows in their wake. After all, she is their guarantee of safe conduct into Spain. The heiress is utterly unconscious of the fact that those who have strings to pull are those who always ultimately win the day.

After several hours up on her hill, Leonora spies a herd of horses in the distance, all turning their heads towards her and, without more ado, she heads off towards the green meadow where they are grazing. They don't move away and she caresses them, sniffs them, speaks to them. She is but one more horse, refreshing her face on their lips, combing their manes, wiping their eyes clean of sleep, and is on the point of mounting a yellow stallion who awaits her, when Catherine and Michel frighten them off, simply by turning up in their midst.

'Don't you see what you've done?' Leonora asks them accusingly.

'Then go off with them if you want to!' Catherine yells at her.

'That's quite enough! Tomorrow we are going to try and cross the border into Spain,' Michel interrupts.

'I have more in common with the horses than with you!' Leonora struggles to free herself from Michel's restraining hand, and he sees something in her eyes that makes him withdraw it at once.

Thanks to the documents and the money sent from London by Harold Carrington and handed over by the Jesuit emissary in the service of Imperial Chemical, Catherine positions herself behind the steering wheel of the Fiat once more. Michel has no safe conduct, however, and will catch them up in Madrid; what is most at stake at present is Leonora's health. The Jesuit sits down beside Catherine and the three of them set out for Seu d'Urgell.

'This woman is the death of me, my nerves are shot to shreds,' she advises the Jesuit. 'I've no idea if we will get her even as far as Arinsal.'

'She looks tranquil enough.'

'Every single thing she does is atrocious.'

Leonora has become as unbearable to Catherine as the war.

‘This is my kingdom! Its earth is reddened by the dried blood of the Civil War, and this is where I shall find Max,’ Leonora shouts.

‘If she carries on shouting like this, they are bound to detain us,’ the mysterious Jesuit agrees.

‘Or else she’ll drive me as mad as she is,’ Catherine adds.

21. MADRID

AS THE DAYS GO by, Catherine understands her friend less and less; she had never thought Leonora might put her in danger. Her company becomes more intolerable with each hour that passes. One hundred and ninety-seven kilometres of madness, accentuated by the Jesuit, because he never once raises his voice. Eventually, Leonora proposes abandoning the Fiat and continuing by train to Madrid. Catherine sighs with relief. At least she would not be driving accompanied by the lunatic shrieks of her friend. The Jesuit bids them farewell. Here, in the branch office of Imperial Chemical, their mission is to be accomplished.

Leonora endows every word she hears with a significance she alone can decipher. It becomes the key to pursuing their journey in a landscape strafed by bombs.

On the first night they put themselves up in the Hotel Internacional, close to the station. Although meals are only served in the dining room, Leonora's beauty and her deep eyes persuade the staff to bring her dinner up on to the roof garden, so that she can look out over the rooftops of Madrid.

They move to the Hotel Roma. Catherine sends telegram after telegram to Michel and when, after six days, he appears, she throws herself into his arms.

'I am dead. Every day she gets more impossible. You try looking after her.'

Inside the Hotel Roma, Leonora again demands her dinner on the roof terrace. She shouts aloud in a state of euphoria: 'As soon as all the suffering that has accumulated in my guts is dispelled, Madrid will also become calm again. Madrid lives in my belly and I shall return health to this city!'

'Madrid is the stomach of the world,' the porter advises her.

She spends the night seated on the toilet with a catastrophic bout of diarrhoea. Next morning she happily announces that in voiding her guts, she has liberated Madrid. Her belly, now cleansed of the least residue of slime, can reveal the full bounty of humanity.

As soon as she can gather the strength to do so, she yells: 'The war is over!'

Catherine and Michel opt to lock her in her room.

'I have to take Max's passport to the Foreign Ministry, in order to obtain a visa for him.' Leonora is adamant. Realising she will not be able to leave by the door, Leonora exits by the window and, at great risk to her life, steps out along the roof cornice. She walks in through the lobby, cleaving a path between the guests before her, to be

intercepted by a tall, blond Dutchman, who immediately stands in her way:

'I am Van Ghent.'

Without further ceremony, Leonora accosts him:

'Can you obtain a visa for Max Ernst for me? It's vital to get him out of France.'

'I believe I know you already: my daughter works in Imperial Chemical's branch office here in Madrid. She would be delighted to assist you.'

The omnipresent persecutor and Nazi sympathiser Harold Carrington yet again! All her accumulated distress tightens her chest.

'Van Ghent?'

By way of proof, the man holds out his passport.

'It's blighted with swastikas!' Leonora is horrified. 'You are on the other side, and I am revealing myself to you.'

'Why is it you see swastikas everywhere?'

'You're in cahoots with the Nazis!' Leonora is once again swirling in the mists of delirium.

Unburdening herself of all her identity cards is her one salvation, and Leonora hands over her own passport to an unknown man in the hotel lobby.

'Take it, it's a present.'

The unknown man retreats and Van Ghent regards her with something approaching scorn. Leonora attempts to offload the entire contents of her handbag — a tube of lipstick, powder, hanky, a little mirror — all without success.

'Why is everyone looking at me like this? I am handing them over quite politely.'

Pinpricks of rejection and humiliation redden her cheeks.

Van Ghent proffers her his arm. His body is as rigid as armour. His look is steely, his cheeks clean-shaven and his forehead broad beneath his receding fair hairline; his protuberant jaw line and cheekbones give his head the appearance of a skull.

From that moment on, Leonora decides to discard everyone else and remain glued to Van Ghent, since she has convinced herself that he will procure a visa for Max.

Van Ghent offers her a cigarette and while he lights it he says:

'Keep the packet.'

He steers her with martial steps towards a table in the café and asks her what she would like to drink.

'A cup of tea, please.'

Leonora pursues him magnetised, much to the relief of the suddenly unburdened Caroline and Michel. The man seats himself at the bar, Leonora seats herself at his side, and exchanges her tea for a

Scotch, watching him relentlessly. The annoyance of the Dutchman is immediately obvious to all.

'Don't think that I am unaware of what you're doing, Van Ghent. You are using the way you stare at everyone here to manipulate their behaviour. See how the people passing by all pause at our table!'

'Yes indeed. And the reason is that, in your mood of exultation, you are making a spectacle of yourself.'

'I am not making the slightest movement,' protests Leonora, rummaging in her bag.

'What are you looking for?'

'My badge of support for the Republic.'

'Why aren't you wearing it, then?'

'I lost it.'

'It will be somewhere there in your bag.'

The badge appears and Van Ghent himself pins it to her lapel. Leonora does not know whether to thank him or to feel scared, for Van Ghent's mental powers are limitless. If Van Ghent requested it, Hitler would surrender to him, not a single bomber would cross the skies of Europe, the tanks would no longer advance upon them, everyone could go home, and Max would once again — immediately — be at her side. 'If Van Ghent's power is not pernicious, then he alone will save Madrid.'

Leonora gets up from her seat and goes from one table to the next, pointing out the saviour of Spain, France and England. The customers look round at where she points to but the man has dematerialised.

'Your Messiah is a spectre!' they say, and they laugh at her.

Three uniformed officers take her by the arm, put her into a car, and drive her to a house with wrought iron balconies. They install her in a room with red satin curtains and carpets, gilt doors and mouldings, Chinese hangings and ceramic ginger jars.

They throw her down onto a bed, tearing her clothes as they rip them off her, and try to rape her.

Leonora puts up such resistance that they finally abandon the attempt. As she tries to tidy up in front of the mirror, one of the men empties a bottle of Eau de Cologne on her head. Another rifles through her handbag.

They abandon her in the Retiro Park and she walks round in circles until a policeman finds her looking dishevelled and asks if she has lost her way:

'I'm staying at the Hotel Roma.'

On reaching her room number 17 at three in the morning, she phones Van Ghent to recount the tragedy that has befallen her. The Dutchman furiously hangs up on her.

There are some nightdresses on her bed, sent to be laundered by Catherine, and which the housemaid has left in Room 17 in error. She imagines they must be a present from Van Ghent by way of an apology for having left her on her own. She takes a cold bath and puts on a pink nightdress; then another cold bath, and she tries on the pale green one; and so, going from one nightdress to the next, she continues until dawn when she decides to wear the pink nightdress because it chimes with the rising sun.

Persuaded that Van Ghent is hypnotising the citizens of Madrid with poisoned sweets, Leonora requests the hotel administration to provide her with newspapers and scissors to make kites. On them she writes: 'Hitler is a menace to Madrid' over a thousand times. When she has accumulated an acceptable number, she goes up to the top floor of the hotel and looses the kites. She also writes, in capital letters, VISA FOR MAX; MADRID MUST BE LIBERATED; DEATH TO FRANCO. When she sees passers-by trampling over them, she goes out into the street shouting: 'Hitler will destroy us all!' and distributes the rest of her propaganda leaflets herself. Some passers-by extend their hands and take them, others avoid her.

Then she runs up to Catherine's room, arriving out of breath. She commands her to look into her eyes and launches into another disturbing question:

'Have you observed how my face is the exact image of the war?'

Catherine slams the door in her face.

Downstairs, in the hall of the Hotel Roma filled with German soldiers, she runs into Van Ghent and his son.

'You are the one who has been sending out all the paper planes, aren't you?' asks the terrified young man, the spitting image of his father. 'Would you like me to give you the news I have brought of Harold Carrington?' he then enquires obsequiously and, when Leonora tells him '*No*', Van Ghent *père* intervenes:

'Let her be, she's mad.'

Humiliated, Leonora risks life and limb crossing the main road between the traffic, runs back to the Retiro Park, and flings herself down on the lawn, much to the surprise of both the adults and children there, since trespassing on the grass is strictly forbidden. Upon noticing that she is being stared at, Leonora's acrobatics become even more daring. Mothers grab their children by the hand and flee, calling out for the police. A Falangist official takes her to the hotel lobby and a bell hop accompanies her to room number 17. She undresses once more and spends hours in a cold bath.

The nightdresses have vanished.

Van Ghent is but another version of Harold Carrington, her executioner; she must overthrow him. She alone can defeat him, as

she used to when a child. Otherwise she will be rebuffed by Maurie, Winkie, her mare, Nanny, Gerard, King George VI of England, the dukes of Norfolk or York, Lord Cavendon, the Duke of Cavendish, all of them right down to and including Tim, the chauffeur's son.

It now suddenly occurs to her that the cigarettes given her by the Dutchman must be poisoned.

'That's why I can't sleep.'

The one way to liberate Madrid is to denounce the evil powers of Van Ghent and, in order to achieve this, an accord between Spain and England is essential. She phones the British Embassy and, on hearing her surname, the consul gives her an immediate appointment:

'Hitler and his followers have hypnotised the world and Van Ghent is Hitler's emissary to Spain. It is essential to remove his hypnotic powers. That is the sole means of turning back the war.'

Leonora is a beautiful but terrifying sight, with her crinkly hair and her mad black eyes. She speaks standing up, her pronunciation is as immaculate as her distinction. The diplomat has no time even to ask her to be seated before Leonora starts issuing him with threats:

'Instead of losing time in labyrinthine politics and economics, we must put our faith in metaphysical force and distribute it to every human being.'

'Miss Carrington, please sit down.'

'I cannot be seated, I am as stalled as Catherine's Fiat.'

'Kindly show me your passport.'

Leonora empties her handbag on to the desk.

'Are you the daughter of the President of Imperial Chemical?'

Leonora turns on her heels, walks out, and leaves the man talking to thin air.

After a few days, Leonora presents herself at the Embassy once more, and the diplomat observes that Mr. Carrington's daughter is unwell. He puts through a telephone call to Doctor Martínez Alonso.

'This is a serious problem for the British Embassy: it concerns the daughter of an English magnate! I have already been in communication with the ambassador, Eric Phipps, and he has instructed me to manage this situation with maximum discretion. Above all we should always remember to treat the lady as who she is: Harold Carrington's daughter. Otherwise unfortunate consequences are bound to follow. We have to put ourselves at her service.'

Dr. Martínez Alonso offers his confirmation: 'The political views expressed by the young lady are the fruit of her paranoid disturbance.' After four days, it is decided to transfer her to the Hotel Ritz.

'Your daughter is highly perturbed. She is not only putting her own life at risk, but that of all the rest of us. She is in urgent need of medical attention,' reads the highly confidential telegram sent to the

address of Imperial Chemical.

Catherine and Michel vanish and Leonora neither notices their departure nor registers that she is no longer at liberty. In her room at the Ritz, a big improvement on that at the Roma, she happily washes her clothes in the bath, and creates new garments for herself out of the towels. She informs the housemaid that she has an appointment with Franco, therefore she requires proper apparel for the interview.

'Low-cut or right up to my neck? Close-fitting or as wide as a ballerina's skirts? Hat and gloves? I shall awaken and liberate him from his somnambulism!'

As soon as Franco hears her, he will reach a peace accord with England and then Germany, then finally France. He will sign the peace treaty and thus the war will come to an end.

22. SANTANDER

BACK AT THE RITZ, Dr. Martínez Alonso administers quantities of bromides sufficient for a soldier in the barracks, and begs her — when she summons a waiter to supply room service — not to open the door if she happens to be naked.

'Doctor, you have to listen to me. I know how to bring this war to an end. You need to obtain an interview with Franco for me. We have to get rid of Hitler and Mussolini who, in addition to having transformed us into spectres, go around handing out pieces of misery as if they were sugared almonds.'

The other hotel guests complain of the scandals she causes.

'You are all Hitler's slaves!' Leonora opens the door to her room and bawls down the corridor. She yells at all hours of the day or night. The owner himself comes upstairs to try and calm her down. Leonora defends every one of her political opinions passionately.

'Hitler has hypnotised us. If we don't do something, he will annihilate us.'

'I am very much afraid that Miss Carrington cannot remain at the Ritz,' warns the manager, Braulio Peralta.

Rather than take the lift, Leonora goes up and down the stairs, running out into the street and then rushing back in again a few minutes later.

'I run faster than my body can keep up,' she says.

She parts the way ahead of her with her arms, her movements are disjointed. The kindly porter restrains her.

'I will not permit them to take me away. I am in a nightmare; my appearance is as you see me, but inside I am a night mare. That's how I was born. Death to Nazism!'

Dr. Martínez Alonso throws in the towel, leaving her in the care of a young doctor with green eyes called Alberto.

'Alberto, you are my brother Gerard, and you have come to free me, you will help me accomplish my mission.'

Leonora throws herself into his arms, losing no time in the attempt to seduce him.

'I've had no opportunity to enjoy love ever since Max was taken away, and I now need it urgently. I believe Alberto finds me attractive, and is interested in me; he is also very interested in Papa's many millions, for Carrington is a name known in Madrid, thanks to Imperial Chemical Industries.'

What a beautiful girl and what strength in her arms when she embraces him! What light in the sparkle of her eyes, and what strength of will! Her brio excites Alberto every time he enters her

room. How to dominate this mare with her black mane, who whinnies and paws her hooves, and here, in such a smart hotel? He intuits that deep inside her lies an important truth: the hysteria she bears inside her body is a reaction to fascism. He, too, is repelled by Germany's belligerent stance. Within a few days, Alberto rescues her from her room, inviting her to dine out with him. It is a treat to watch her walking along the streets of Madrid. Her gestures, her movements, are as lovely as she is. She knows perfectly how to move, to run, to laugh and to hold his attention; what a fabulous sense of humour! Leonora enjoys and makes the most of her freedom.

Thanks to Alberto, Leonora turns up daily from Monday to Friday to protest at the office of the Madrid manager of Imperial Chemical, then transfers her attentions to the consul of the British Empire. Alberto awaits her outside. To begin with, officials listen to her, stupefied by her beauty, but she begins to weary them with a garbled, endless and peremptory list of her political demands.

'You have to support the French Resistance, only the Maquis can do away with the Nazis, and bring the collaborators to justice: Pétain, Laval, the whole Vichy lot of them.' Her eyes flash lightning.

'Here she comes again,' the porters give notice.

'I think she must be a maniac,' ventures the consul.

'She is suffering from a massive depression, but I don't blame her. The worst part is that every day she repeats the same things, and every day she becomes more enraged,' the first secretary Elvira Lindo, the best there is at the Embassy, sympathises.

Noting that even after a week she has obtained no reaction, Leonora accuses them all — along with Harold Carrington and Van Ghent — of petty-mindedness and a failure of courage.

Each time she fails to find the Madrid manager of Imperial Chemical in his office, she ferrets him out of his home, and roundly insults him in front of his wife, his children, his chauffeur, his maids, and whoever else happens to be around. The director agrees with the British consul and calls for Dr. Pardo.

'We would like to seek your opinion.'

When given her head, Leonora can be eloquent, and could mobilise the whole of Spain, this country now steeped in wreckage. The young doctor Alberto has already been neutralised by her. Utterly seduced, he does everything she wishes.

In the opinion of Dr. Pardo: 'This woman must be hospitalised', and the Embassy representative concludes: 'She has now crossed every line, and we have to do something. Mr. Carrington has given us *carte blanche.*'

'I know of a clinic run by some nuns,' ventures Dr. Pardo.

In the sanatorium run by nuns in which Leonora is confined, 'the

madwoman' unlocks doors and windows and steps out onto the roof. 'Here is my natural home,' she proclaims. Seeing the everyday life of Madrid from high above gives her a sense of euphoria. On a cornice over the convent she can observe pedestrians coming and going. 'That's what we are, ants, beetles, every kind of insect.' The nuns call the Fire Brigade to bring her down.

One of them comments: 'This woman is a wildfire.'

The entire convent is in a state of agitation and the Mother Superior declares herself unable to control the Englishwoman:

'May God keep her in his holy sanctuary, for our community can do nothing more for her.'

'Miss Carrington represents a major fortune; it is therefore out of the question to give up on her,' insists the director of the Madrid branch of Imperial Chemical.

'If the nuns' convent didn't work, the sole option left to us is the place run in Santander by Dr. Morales. His is one of the very few institutions I would be willing to recommend,' Dr. Pardo once again ventures. 'Her Majesty Queen Victoria Eugenia visited it in 1912. She even dined and attended a charity bazaar there. The clinic is among the most established in Spain. The patients are drawn from the aristocracy and the high bourgeoisie. They are refined persons, hence the prestige and high regard in which the institution is held. Morales is an expert, and also a good Catholic, and pays personal attention to each one of his clients. I believe they number no more than forty, because the clinic is so extremely expensive. England is the country that produces the greatest number of lunatics. In addition, the sanatorium is a former mansion house set in grounds of a hundred and seventy thousand square metres, an orchard, and large green meadows where on Sundays the best families in Santander gather to take their horses for a gentle ride.'

'A mansion house?'

'Indeed. It's a smallish but imposing residential palace …'

Harold Carrington issues the order to have his daughter confined and, once restored to health, to be returned to Hazelwood.

After three days in the convent, the local director of Imperial Chemical in Madrid visits her, together with Dr. Pardo and Dr. Martínez Alonso, who invite her to Santander. 'The many roofs afford an incomparable view and await your visit.' Trustingly, she lets them take her by the arm and guide her to a car which pulls up at high speed. The Santander clinic is a long way from Madrid. After half-an-hour, she becomes restless and asks where they are taking her. When she tries to open the car door, Dr. Pardo injects her with Luminal, a sedative so strong that she is rendered unconscious and is handed over, still in a deep faint, at the door to the asylum run by Dr.

Mariano Morales.

The Psychiatric Hospital has several pavilions. Leonora is taken on a stretcher to Villa Covadonga, the one where the dangerously insane are held. The date is 23rd August 1940.

She wakes up in a tiny room without windows. On her right-hand side she can see a bedside table, with a space below for a chamber pot. Beside the bed stands a wardrobe, and in front of it a glass door leading into a corridor and another door she studies avidly, as she intuits it must lead to the sun. No doubt she has had a car accident and has been brought to hospital. She then notices her hands and feet are bound with straps.

In English, she asks the nurse: 'Why am I here? How long have I been unconscious?'

The nurse, Frau Asegurado, replies harshly, and in English: 'For several days. You behaved like an animal, leapt like a monkey on top of the cupboard, and then kicked and bit.'

'Who has tied me up like this?'

'The hospital director. On the afternoon when you arrived, an attempt was made to give you food, but you scratched him so hard it was decided to bind you.'

'I don't remember a thing about any of that. Please can you untie me?' asks Leonora with consummate politeness.

'Are you going to behave?'

She is offended by the question, since she behaves well with everyone. She knows the secret formula to stop the war and, rather than listen to her, they gag her. She still finds it impossible to remember her fits of violence.

'Where are my doctors?'

'They returned to Madrid.'

'Are we far from Madrid?'

'Very far indeed.'

'May I get dressed and go for a walk outside?' Leonora's powers of seduction soften the nurse, and she unties her.

Despite the trembling in her legs and the torpor of her movements, she finds herself in a different room with iron bars at the window. These are bound to pose no problem, since she will convince them to part and set her free. At the very moment she leaps up and hangs like a bat in order to force the bars open, someone jumps on her and she falls on her feet, pulled down by some idiot who lives in the asylum. Leonora hurls herself on top of him, scratches him ferociously, and he flees, covered in blood.

'Now look what you have done!' Frau Asegurado is horrified. 'He is the guard at the Villa Covadonga, who lives here thanks to the charity of Dr. Morales.'

‘What’s all this about Villa Covadonga?’

‘It’s the name of this pavilion. Covadonga was Don Mariano’s daughter and sister to Don Luis and, since she is now dead, it is named in her honour.’

As soon as she has recovered a little strength, Leonora obtains permission to go out into the apple orchard in front of the Covadonga pavilion. From the dry leaves crackling under her feet, she gathers that the summer is now over.

The residents whose paths she crosses make indecipherable gestures, some muttering to themselves, others throwing themselves down on the lawn, to be lifted up by their carers. An old woman removes her clothes; another, wrapped in an old coat, blows on her hands to warm them. Her agony distorts her facial features, and twists her every movement. All they are left with are their feelings, and they cannot find the means to express them. They seek to draw the nurses’ attention, attempting to convince them of the importance of what they are trying to communicate. They have lost the use of words. Two of the women appear to be dead, nothing rouses them from their bench, nor does the absurd behaviour of the rest prompt them to look up. Who is punishing them? Who is stopping them from moving? Perhaps they are Jews? If so, she would have to rush to save them.

‘Sit down please. Here is a seat.’

‘What’s happening to everyone?’ asks Leonora. ‘What’s the matter with these people? Are they Jewish?’

‘They have lost their reason, but here we are teaching them how to live in society,’ replies Frau Asegurado.

‘So this is what it means to live in society?’

The nurse tries to keep her on her side:

‘Sit down, like a good girl, you have taken too much exercise today, and you’re very tired.’

‘If I sit down I’ll die!’ howls Leonora.

‘Don’t shout, don’t shout.’

The whole world must understand what has happened and register who is the cause of its happening. If she suffers in silence, the silence will bring about her death.

‘It’s unjust and I cannot remain here. Why are they all locked up?’

Leonora’s brain is issuing orders but her tongue refuses to obey. Nobody understands her. Her arms and hands refuse to respond. Inside of herself, a spirit of evil intent is striving to drag her into disaster. If she pauses an instant before trying again, she may have a chance of succeeding in saying what she thinks.

She again feels as if she is shipwrecked, drowning in her own rage. Nobody understands her. Who is making her run such a risk? Who is humiliating and maltreating her like this? Why isn’t her

mother coming to her rescue? She gets up so abruptly she knocks over her bench, and runs zigzags across the lawn to interrogate the trees, the grass, the pavilion doors. The carer is going red in the face with the effort of keeping up with her.

'Hey, hey — you aren't a little girl any more. Fancy running about like that!'

But yes, Leonora is an abandoned child, what's happening to her is quite enough to make her lose her reason.

'What reason? What's this reason they all keep talking about?' She pulls up short in front of a young man dressed in overalls, staring at her curiously before saying, in Spanish:

'Good afternoon.'

'Are you *Alberto*, my magic horse, possessed of mysterious powers to climb up and down the cosmic tree?'

'Perhaps I am,' and he smiles.

'Where am I?' she asks him.

'In Spain,' he replies.

'The vegetation is a lot like in Ireland, despite the fact that the people I see around me make me think that I'm on another planet.'

'This is another world inhabited by a different civilisation,' the man continues, still smiling.

'And as for Alice, where is she? Because I think I've fallen down the same bottomless rabbit hole.'

The carer catches up with her and explains that the young man is a gardener working at the asylum, among the various pavilions housing radiography, the solarium, the Villa Pilar, the Villa Covadonga, the library, the administration offices, the garden alongside the dining rooms for the admin offices, and the consulting rooms for Doctors Mariano and Luis Morales. She points out the door through which the father and son come to work and there, at the end, stands the finest of all the pavilions and the most modern, the convalescent home that everyone there calls Down Below, since it is the door to freedom.

23. THE TWO DOCTORS MORALES

DR. MARIANO MORALES' FAME spread far and wide, and Frau Asegurado and the rest of the nurses and orderlies take great pride in propagating it.

'This estate is his property,' conjectures the German nurse, 'and it extends as far as Peñacastillo. As well as the central citadel, Don Mariano had the pavilions built to his personal specifications and under his personal supervision. He is clearly concerned not simply for the health of his patients but also because he wants them to have space in which to relax, where they can occupy themselves in drawing, painting and playing the piano. He is a specialist in mental pathology, and renowned throughout Europe. As is his son. So calm down, you are in the best of hands, and now we are going to sit down,' and she takes Leonora by the arm.

'You're talking of the Doctors Morales as if they were gods.'

'They are, for they will determine your fate,' and the nurse pulls a hideous smile.

'Rather than be in their hands, I'd far prefer to be in Alberto's arms, and he's a doctor too.'

The nurse affects not to hear her.

'I would like to draw a map of the different pavilions, although I would prefer to give them different names such as Jerusalem, Africa, Amachu and Egypt, in order to feel that I can travel to other continents. Can you obtain some paper and pencil for me to draw the map?'

'Patients tend to aspire towards the impossible,' the nurse replies.

Leonora agrees to sit down on a bench, the sheet of paper on her lap. She draws a confusing labyrinth incorporating disparate places, through which she hopes to find a way back to St. Martin d'Ardèche, Crookhey Hall, Hazelwood, or her flat on the Rue Jacob, all set among trees and towers, staircases, bars and crosses, tracing a lengthy and shaky wall to encompass all the pavilions.

'It's the only hope I have of not losing the way.'

The nurse has grown bored with the efforts of her patient, who keeps repeating in anguish:

'I have to find the way.'

'The way to the light?' enquires the nurse, with irony.

To her surprise, someone behind the thick railings of the pavilion Down Below calls out to her:

'Leonora, Leonora.'

Stupefied, Leonora asks: 'Who are you?'

'Alberto!'

The doctor who so loves her is in Santander, in order to carry her away.

Leonora starts running like a deer, gathering strength and agility and jumping with joy among the apple trees.

'Alberto loves me. Alberto!'

Frau Asegurado is unable to see any Alberto. Now out of breath, she has lost control of Leonora and the auxiliary, Piadosa, appears with Moro, a black dog, in her wake. Leonora runs faster and further than anyone, she gallops like a mare again. Alberto has come for her, the best thing that could possibly happen.

The chase is directed by a tall fat man thundering after her, whom Leonora recognises as a powerful type. 'He's the one who will give the order to stop my persecution.' Reassured, she retraces her steps and, on confronting him, notices that he has protruding eyes that dissect her with blue rays, just like Van Ghent's did. No doubt this man with pale eyes who is holding out his hand to her is in cahoots with the gang of all those at Imperial Chemical.

Leonora darts off again, leaving him standing there with his hand held out. She is the mare of the night, no-one can touch her, her black hair streams behind her and the doctor enjoys the chase up until the point where, at a bend in the path, two male nurses appear named José and Santos, and proceed to throw themselves at her. José is tall and athletic; Santos robust and clean-shaven. Leonora measures up to her attackers, distributing kicks, for her desperation gives her supernatural strength. Finally the male nurses fling a breathless Leonora at the feet of Don Luis. José pins down her torso, while Santos and Frau Asegurado take care of her arms and legs. The nurse makes use of a moment of inattention to stick a needle in her. What are they injecting into her? By what right can they do this? No sooner have they released her than she launches herself like a wild beast upon Dr. Luis Morales, pounding him on the chest, scratching him until he bleeds, until Santos comes up behind her and grabs her by the neck. Luis Morales scarpers, adjusts his white coat, and frog-marches Leonora into the Villa Covadonga.

José and Santos tie her down naked to the bed. Don Luis enters the room and studies her. Leonora asks why they are holding her prisoner and treating her so badly. The doctor vanishes without replying to her questions.

'Don Luis is your doctor,' Frau Asegurado informs her.

'Does he live here?'

'No.'

'This is the first time I've seen him and I can't remember a thing.' Leonora is afraid, and swears to herself that from now on no-one else will come into her room to interrogate her. How many more things

can happen to her over which she has no control?

That night, Leonora forces herself to stay awake, solely by willpower. She keeps repeating: 'I won't let them take possession of me again, I won't let them annihilate me,' until she sees Frau Asegurado come in and untie her.

'Here, take your medicine,' and she holds out a pill and a glass of water.

'What is it?'

'Disinfectant.'

'What is this medicine called?'

'I've already told you. Swallow it.'

'No, I am not going to take anything when I don't know what it is.'

'The person in charge here is the doctor.'

'No, I am in charge of myself.'

'In which case we shall have to give you another injection.'

'I won't tolerate even one more injection, nor that you block my path every time I try to take a step.'

Leonora jumps off her bed and runs across the room to lock herself in the bathroom. Her weight is so strong against the door that Frau cannot open it, and calls for Dr. Luis Morales.

'If you do not take your medicine, we shall be obliged to give you another injection, and your body is already badly bruised. Kindly do yourself the favour of obeying.'

'If I didn't obey my father, I am even less likely to obey *you*.'

Thanks to José, she manages to send Don Luis a sheet of paper with a triangle drawn on it, to explain why she was called to save the world, and why the Dutchman Van Ghent should be locked up instead of her.

Don Luis receives her in his consulting room, indicating a chair where she should be seated in front of him.

'I possess certain powers,' Leonora gesticulates, 'many powers. When I see adverts on the streets of Madrid I can divine what is behind them, just like whenever I see tinned food, I can see the contents inside. If I read the names Amazon Company or Imperial Chemical, I can see all the way back to the fields or farms and impose quality control. When the phone rings and I pick it up to say "hello," and then a voice does not answer, I know who it is. In any café in Madrid, or in the lobby of the Hotel Roma, I could descry anyone's most secret intentions just by listening to the vibrations of their voice. Even with my back turned to the door, I could tell who was coming into the room, and I correctly identified Catherine and Michel or Van Ghent and Van Ghent's son.'

'Carry on,' the doctor encourages her.

‘I could also understand every language, including even Irish. At times like that I adored myself, I revered myself — how omnipotent I was! — I contained everything within me. I congratulated myself because my eyes had miraculously become solar systems; my movements, a great dance of freedom; and I, integral to this dance, was about to save the city. In Madrid I listened to the song *Ojos Verdes* — and knew it to be a sign from the Cosmos, because Gerard has green eyes, as do both Alberto and Michel Lukacs — who got me out of St. Martin d’Ardèche — and the young Argentine who looked at me so sympathetically on the train.’

‘Could you draw a map of your journey from St. Martin d’Ardèche to here?’ Morales asks her, and sets her to work tracing her route all the way from France to Spain.

Leonora is unable to comply, or to satisfy him. Don Luis takes the pencil from her hand and sketches the itinerary of her journey himself. At the centre of the page he puts an M for Madrid. It is just at that moment that Leonora has a first flash of enlightenment: the M refers to her and not to *mundo*, to the world. If she can manage to reconstruct this itinerary, she can also re-establish communication between her mind and body.

The Morales are lords of the universe, using their powers to sow terror. She will overthrow them and set her companions there free.

The following afternoon an unknown man with a doctor’s briefcase in his hand pauses at her bedside:

‘I have come to take some blood we need for a test. I shall be back in a minute with Don Luis.’

To which Leonora replies: ‘Either you or Don Luis, I only receive one doctor at a time, and I am not willing to accept any injections on any pretext at all.’

The man with the briefcase starts arguing, and in return Leonora insults him. She prepares to leap out at him, and he moves swiftly aside. When Don Luis enters, Leonora announces:

‘I’m leaving.’

Suave and insinuating, Don Luis explains the blood sampling to her.

Leonora wants to reply to him but from her mouth again Hitler, Franco and their infamous alliance emerge, and their bombings; she holds the key to ending the war, and she can now count on an ally, her lover Alberto, the doctor waiting outside for her.

‘Where are you Alberto? Alberto has come to my rescue! O, Alberto, Alberto, Alberto! Alberto loves me! Albertooo!’

All of a sudden José, Santos, Frau Asegurado and Piadosa enter together and a white avalanche falls on top of her, covering her like a shroud: two hands clasp her legs, others stretch out one of her arms

and, just before they stab her with the needle, she manages to ask:

'Why are you treating me so badly? Can't you understand that I'm a mare?'

Leonora coughs, then yells. Her muscles contract, spasms race from her womb to her breast, her head is thrown back, her jawbone seems to be dislocated. Her mouth opens in an immense, terrifying grimace.

'Don't let her over-arch her back, she could fracture her spinal column,' Luis Morales orders, taking out his stethoscope, because the heartbeat accelerates in such a manner that it could easily race towards its final spasm.

Frau Asegurado, José and Santos immobilise Leonora's arms and legs. In the case of other patients, the administration of Cardiazol had resulted in multiple fractures, one had even fallen and broken his entire vertebral column. Leonora moves around more than most, and her breasts are shaking.

'She's so very young,' says José. 'She has the strong legs of a well-built woman, the muscles are long, and it's obvious she does a lot of sport.'

Luis Morales agrees with the male nurse.

'What a shame,' José interrupts once more. 'She's a good-looking girl.'

A convulsion in her vital organs sends Leonora back up to the surface so rapidly she feels vertiginous. She sees again those blue eyes with their fixed and frightening stare and howls:

'I don't want it, I don't want this impure force within me! I am growing, I am growing bigger and bigger, and I am afraid!'

A current slices into her forehead and a shaft of pain crosses her body, doubles her over, and she's left rigid. She is still just about able to think that nothing better than death could happen to her, when the electricity crackles and emits sparks: 'It's my neurons. They're turning me into a lettuce leaf.'

The Cardiazol provokes something akin to an epileptic attack.

Later on, José confirms that her fit lasted for several minutes; convulsed, hideous, every part of her body, including her arms and wrists, her breasts and belly, were becoming twisted and deformed:

'Look, just so that you understand me: your head was sizzling, your skin was scraped, we placed a rag between your teeth so that you couldn't bite your tongue. When the convulsions began you stopped shouting. This form of treatment also produces diarrhoea, the patient loses all control of their bodily functions, tries to speak but only unintelligible sounds emerge.'

'José, if it were up to you, and you were a doctor, would you use this form of therapy?'

‘This is the treatment offered to the incurable.’
‘The incurable?’
‘Yes. Your records read: “Incurable”.’
‘I don’t understand.’
‘It means that there is no remedy for your insanity.’

24. INSANITY

WHEN LEONORA ATTEMPTS TO SPEAK, either her tongue twists in her mouth or else her throat feels torn and raw. She spends entire days and nights naked and tormented by mosquitoes. Not to be able to scratch a mosquito bite is sheer torture. She becomes accustomed to the smell of her own sweat and urine; what she cannot adjust to are the swellings in her thighs. In addition, her back also hurts, her legs weigh her down, her temples are piercing and she has a permanent and terrible headache, as if she were wearing a tiara too small for her head.

'You'll continue experiencing these piercing pains for a few days, so for now we won't move you, but it's worth your putting up with these inconveniences because Cardiazol can bring immense benefits,' Frau Asegurado informs her in the course of her constant daytime vigils.

José, who keeps watch over her on the night shift, lights a cigarette and places it between her lips so that she can take a few drags; he brings her a lemon, which Leonora eats whole, including the skin, and which helps to eliminate the bitter taste left in her mouth by the convulsions. He also wipes away her sweat with a damp towel, for which Leonora thanks him. The smell of her faeces doesn't seem to bother him, and he seems a cheerful sort. When Leonora asks him if Piadosa, the cross-eyed auxiliary, has a name that means 'pious one' because her feet make her suffer so much, José guffaws out loud.

After four days, Piadosa brings her a plate of eggs and vegetables which she spoon-feeds her before briskly retiring. She is frightened that Leonora might bite her. But Leonora likes Piadosa and would be incapable of attacking her.

'My teeth hurt me too much for me to eat.'

'It's all quite normal, and happens to everyone we give these injections to. They irritate the patients' gums. But the pain won't last long.'

Fat Santos objects to being stared at by Leonora.

'What are you looking at, you English Miss, who are you staring at?'

'I examine everyone around me. I have nothing else to do but to observe them while I put up with everything else. The one thing I can't bear is the swelling that paralyses my left leg. Untie my hand and I can make it feel better, because my hands are always cold.'

Santos affects not to understand. By contrast, at night José unties her and, with nothing more than the touch of her hand, the inflammation goes down, just as she had predicted.

‘That injection is meant to prevent you from walking, we always give it to the uncontrollable patients. No doubt the British are crazy about having been born on an island with so much water, fog and poetry. Don’t worry, within five or six days the effects will wear off.’

‘How dare you do such a thing!’

‘And you, little English Miss, how did you manage to bring yourself to such a pass?’ José smiles and doesn’t judge her. He is genuinely interested in finding an explanation.

When the memory of Alberto, the pain in her thigh, and the conversation with José resurface in her consciousness, Leonora finds herself back in her bed, now fresh and clean.

‘What do I look like?’ she asks José.

‘Better.’

‘But before, what did I look like?’

‘Ugly. Convulsions always make for ugliness.’

‘Did you see me?’

‘Yes.’

‘What did you see?’

‘Grimaces that seemed to ripple down your whole body, and convulsions.’

‘What I least want is compassion. I loathe the thought of pity.’ Leonora is becoming annoyed.

‘Believe you me, that here and now in Spain we are all in need of pity. Having spent so long killing one another, the only thing left that counts is compassion.’

Frau Asegurado is a woman with broad shoulders, hefty and pig-headed. Her hands are strong and her face is flat and firm. Words issue from her mouth as stonily as spat pebbles.

Everyone who lives in the Villa Covadonga, right up to the most docile residents, is subject to mortification. The whole place operates a system of salvation through obedience. The Morales force the inmates to eat when they are not hungry, to sleep when not tired, and to take cold baths at any hour of the day.

‘I don’t want to be saved from myself,’ Leonora informs Luis Morales. ‘It’s you I need to save myself from.’

Leonora becomes increasingly depressed during José’s nightly vigils. Don Luis’ mind is beginning to dominate and possess her. She can hear his enormous desire to crush her. A foreign body inside her is stretching her skin until it turns inside out. She has to get away from Santander and she begs José to accompany her to Madrid, far away from Don Luis. The male nurse replies:

‘It would hardly be appropriate for you to travel nude!’

He holds out a sheet and a pencil as she recites:

‘Liberty, Equality, Fraternity!’

Leonora, swathed in the sheet, painfully trails her leg behind her into the lobby. At the same moment, Don Luis appears, accompanied by Santos and Frau Asegurado. Leonora considers her powers of hypnosis have immobilised them, but they hurl themselves upon her, and drag her off to her room.

It must be Sunday because she can hear the sound of church bells, and the clatter of horses' hooves, awakening within her an enormous nostalgia for Winkie. If only she had him here, she could gallop away. There are riders passing outside, and if there's one thing that Leonora is, it's an Amazon. She finds it impossible to communicate with the outside world, and asks herself who would be likely to help someone riding naked, wrapped in a sheet and armed only with a pencil.

'The only word this woman knows how to say in Spanish is "garden",' the nurse complains to Don Luis, 'and I'm finding it more and more of a chore to have to follow her every time she goes outside and at once runs off at full speed. I am a nurse, not a long-distance runner. "Garden, garden," she keeps repeating to me so piteously.'

'If the English could all turn into lawns, they would. I'll give her another tranquilliser.'

'She does not take medicines like the rest of them. She questions everything, Doctor. After running around the garden like one possessed, she lies down on the ground.'

'That's the way she chooses to calm the turbulence in her brain. Leave her be. If she oversteps the mark, we'll give her another dose of Cardiazol, and another electric shock will help to stabilise her. I've already consulted my father on this … This patient has never known either discipline or control, she has been permitted to do whatever she wanted, and has become extravagant and fantastical in her habits. The Germans know very well how to discipline their citizens in order to have them submit to the common good.'

Luis Morales' smile on entering Leonora's room is that of an inquisitor.

'What day is today?'

'I think it's Monday.'

'And yesterday, what day was it?'

'Sunday, I could hear bells.'

'How old are you?'

'I don't know, I feel very old.'

'When did you come here?'

'Centuries ago.'

'What was St. Martin d'Ardèche like?'

All of a sudden objects started to swim before Leonora's eyes, and chairs wobble as if about to keel over.

'I don't know,' she says. 'When I left, everything suddenly

vanished.'

'And Max?'

'He also vanished. They took him away, I don't know where.'

'Who did?'

'I think a gendarme with a gun came for him.'

'And Max offered no resistance?'

'He was used to it. He had already been taken away once.'

'Leonor, where are you from?'

'From nowhere.'

'Do you remember the country you come from?'

'No.'

'What language are we speaking?'

'I suppose it must be Spanish.'

'No, Leonor, although my accent is perhaps not the best, I am talking to you in English. What languages do you speak?'

'English and French.'

'What did you have to eat a little while ago?'

'It can't have been too memorable for me not to remember it.'

Don Luis smiles.

'And your parents?'

'I don't know where they are. Probably in Hazelwood.'

'What are your parents like?'

'I assume they wear macs, open up their umbrellas, take afternoon tea at five …'

'Try to remember.'

'I can't'

'And your brothers?'

'They are in the army.'

Dr. Luis Morales surveys her with his bright blue eyes:

'Leonor, tell me about yourself.'

'The war …'

'No, don't tell me about the war,' he interrupts her, 'tell me something about your personality, about your life.'

'It is bad manners to keep talking about yourself. Let's not get too personal, you and I. Wars will be over when we accede to the "knowledge", and realise that the great disorder in the world is the work of God and his Son. Look here, Doctor, and pay attention: observe the confusion of objects on the top of this small table, it's the same chaos you find in the workings of the human condition, the chaos which holds the world enslaved by war, indigence and ignorance.'

'Yes, and I promise you that we shall set this world to rights. But we'll start with you, Leonor. At what age did you begin menstruation?'

'I don't discuss such matters.'

‘I am your doctor.’

‘Look here, the moon crossed over the sun, and on this small table, I can arrange various solar systems as perfect and complete as yours …’

‘What is my solar system?’

‘The one you so impudently cause to rotate over our heads, and which causes our convulsions.’

‘Do I appear aggressive to you?’

‘Aggressive? What you perform are the inhuman actions of an authoritarian system of a Nazi, fascist and racist system.’

Leonora starts to tremble.

‘Quieten down, I only want to try and help you. When did you start menstruating?’

‘Europe transformed my blood into energy. My blood is both masculine and feminine at the same time, it is microcosmic, and forms part of the universe because it is the wine I offer both the moon and the sun to drink. I used to make wine, I know all there is to know about vineyards and, just as I trod my own grapes, so I’ll trample the Germans invading France, Spain and England.’

‘I don’t doubt it,’ Luis Morales replies sympathetically. ‘Women surrender their lives in the cause of humanity. If it were down to them, there would be no more wars. Take comfort: our sons have died for God, Spain and the king!’

‘But look here, I don’t believe in God, I don’t have any sons, still less am I a patriot, and the king is an idiot. All I want is to get out of here, if only you and my father would let me.’

‘That depends entirely on your good behaviour,’ Luis Morales tells her.

‘Inside this matchbox I put a picture of Franco and, next to him, a little piece of excrement. Take a look: it’s dry now.’

Luis Morales blinks repeatedly, and his blue eyes no longer seem so prominent.

‘Tell me, what is your father like?’

‘My father is the perfect example of the common man.’

‘And you accept that?’

‘He is an ethical, honest and tolerant man, attached to all he deems normal and rational, and hasn’t the least understanding of me.’

‘Does he understand your brothers?’

‘Yes, because they do exactly what he wants them to.’

‘Good. Yet your father is not a bad person, you yourself said as much.’

‘No he isn’t, but he always preferred my brothers and sidelined me because I am a woman. He is lord and master of house and home, and his presence intimidates everyone. Even when I was a child, I can

remember that as soon as he appeared, we all stopped playing.'

'Why can you not obey your father?'

'Because there's something inside me that prevents it. Whenever I used to tell him I was bored at home, he would answer with: "Breed fox terriers", as if training dogs could save me. Or else say "Learn to cook", when I was incapable of showing the least interest in whether you first have to put the butter or the egg into the frying pan. He would have been happiest of all had I married a rich man and gone to Mass every Sunday.'

'And why, now that you are here in the sanatorium, do you think you are entitled to special treatment?' Luis Morales asks her, with a touch of sarcasm.

'Because I am special. May I smoke?'

'Yes.'

Although it is forbidden to smoke in the sanatorium, he lights her cigarette for her. Don Luis had had a vocation to the priest-hood, but a preference for medicine.

'How good you didn't become a priest, I loathe the clergy! At least you have no pretensions to sanctimoniousness. In any case, I like you as a man.'

'Do you find me attractive?'

'It depends.'

This woman, with her prodigious inner life and her beauty, is a gift from God. Her desire for independence and her self-confidence dazzle him. Accustomed to treating patients who are the victims of circumstances, Leonora causes him to marvel: she is certainly a unique case. Don Luis smiles on her. She is unsure whether or not to return the smile.

Leonora tries to say one thing and something else comes out. Her mouth is suddenly filled with saliva. 'If only this superior man, god, doctor and analyst, would just leave me in peace!'

'No more interrogations,' and she rises restlessly. 'I need to reflect and to find a solution. Yesterday I was on the point of reaching one.'

What does this man want of her? Why does he destroy her routine? All of a sudden the certainty that Morales wishes to do her harm imposes itself:

'Leave me alone, leave me! Can't you tell that I am stretched out in the sun, on the white stones of St. Martin d'Ardèche?'

The doctor smiles: 'It's normal for you to feel dislocated. You need to take your time.'

She begins to turn away and the nurse takes her by the arm.

As the days go by, other inmates observe her through the glass door. They come into her room. Sometimes the Prince of Monaco, as noble as his lineage, greets her reverentially, waving his cadaverous

hand around in the air. Others, including the Marquess Da Silva, the intimate friend of King Alfonso Xlll and of Franco, parades around as if wearing a crown on his head, and when he extends his hand, Leonora notices his nails are bitten.

'He chews them because he is a heroin addict,' says José. 'They injected him with Cardiazol, but he thought it was the sting of a spider.'

'You are a friend of Franco's,' Leonora tells the Marquess Da Silva, possessed of an innate elegance, 'and I urgently need to speak to him. Kindly obtain an appointment for me! If you do this, the war will be over.'

Leonora ties her personal life to what else goes on in the world: she is the earth, her arms are olive branches raised against Nazism. It is not she who is imprisoned but rather England, France, Spain who are inside the asylum. Governments are the sum total of every form of egotism that has brought Europe to its demise. He wants to treat their populations precisely as Harold Carrington did her. Her fight is against repression. If they would only untie her, she would once again become the lover of the wind, and gather up all those countries in her arms to carry them off to a safe place high above the clouds.

The Prince of Monaco with his aquiline nose and his wayward gaze has installed a typewriter and a radio in his quarters in the Villa Pilar. From morning till night, he types away with two fingers, writing letters to diplomats. And he invites Leonora to come and listen to broadcasts on Radio Andorra.

'Why do you have so many maps pinned to your wall? Are you going to stay here forever?'

Leonora seeks out the route from St. Martin d'Ardèche and the prince tells her that, if she wishes, she can mark it out in red crayon.

'So you will know your way back, Lady Carrington,' he tells her.

'I am not a Lady, my family has no aristocratic titles. What it does have are airs and graces, which is why they have presumed to incarcerate me here.'

'Why would you want to leave? Outside these walls there's carnage. Inside here, they treat us like royalty.'

'But without the courtiers. I've got such a tune going round inside my head that all I want to do is dance.'

'Then go out into the garden and dance, follow your instincts. I would accompany you, had I not to write to the Duke of Sessa, and to Cayetana de Alba's parents to let them know they need to find her another hairdresser.'

She doesn't need to be told twice, and Leonora leaves with her arms held high above her head, swaying as she walks. Now yes, the freedom in her body is hers alone; the new-found lightness in her

thighs carry her way beyond the asylum. ‘I shall never grow tired, all of me is a fortress!’ When dusk falls, Leonora twirls on her toes and attempts to sing a ballad without need for words. Its melody accompanies the beating of her heart. Are the *sidhes* sending her this music? The Prince of Monaco leaves the typewriter, throws his letters in the air, advances on her clicking invisible castanets and stamps frenetically until he hears Frau Asegurado shouting:

‘Into the cold water with these lunatics!’

25. THE GREAT BEAR

LEONORA LISTENS TO THE CRIES of her fellow detainees, the scraping of chairs on the floor, the rain against the window. Frau Asegurado's tone of voice grates on her ears, unlike Piadosa's and José's. She responds to them by nodding her head, as she acknowledges they treat her with something close to affection.

'You had better not leave off eating, as it won't be long before you're out of here,' José tells her.

She wants to question him about the alarm that wakes her up every morning. Is it a factory hooter? A siren heralding a bomber? Is it war? Does it mean her mission to unleash the day has started? Or does she have to run to the Down Below pavilion and open the doors to let everyone out?

She climbs on a chair, steps out on to the wardrobe, and remains there vigilantly, almost holding her breath. It is always a great pleasure to her, being so high up. She is a high-flying hawk, her eyes glued to the door. A magnetic current holds her up there. If anyone came in she would plummet down on them.

'Look at the sense of balance of the madwoman up there!' Santos exclaims, coming through the door with a pail of water.

'Don't mess with me, I am a painter.'

'Yeah, really? If you sleep in a puddle of shit, your pretensions will turn out shitty too.'

Leonora tenses. It could be that Santos wants to bring her down with a bucketful of cold water. What luck, he goes on with his rounds and it almost seems to her as if he's smiling.

Piadosa comes in with a trolley on which Leonora makes out a glass of milk, some fruit and biscuits, a pot of honey and a mild cigarette.

'Here's your breakfast, little English Miss,' murmurs Piadosa, without so much as raising her eyes.

Leonora descends and, on seeing the arrangement of food on the tray, she is convinced that the doctors are about to transfer her to the best pavilion, Down Below, as luxurious as the Ritz, with windows you can open with pleasure as there's a tree growing in front of each.

She contemplates all possible means of moving to Down Below as quickly as possible, since it all depends on how the pips are distributed inside her apple; the rosiness of the stone inside her peach; and the grape skins on the plate Piadosa has prepared for her. She has to reproduce the constellations: here is the Great Bear, there the Pleiades, over here, the Little Bear, keeping the peach stone to the right and the green grape skins on the other side. Who was it that

once upon a time told her she had the skin of a peach?

Her nurse draws a bath for her.

'You can wash yourself on your own, the soap and sponge are over there.'

Leonora squeezes out the sponge, it's a living creature that once used to float in the sea.

'Have you finally finished? What took you so long? I am going to take you to the solarium.'

Naked, she dances with the towel and, when she lifts it up, Leonora observes that the entire firmament obeys her. That makes it essential for her to resolve the problem of her self in relation to the sun.

The solarium diffuses a blinding light; beneath such a light, Leonora leaves behind the sordid substances of matter and enters into a new space. She remains stretched out there for several hours and the rays reach her through the glass.

'Come out of there now, or you will get sunstroke.'

'Give me a pen and paper.'

The nurse tells her she can write once she comes out, but Leonora wins the match, and obtains her sheet of white paper. On it she laboriously inscribes: 'I am the sun and the moon, I am man and woman, I am night and day, from now on there will be no more war, for from today everyone knows what war is.'

'Take this message to Don Luis.'

'First I am going to give you something to eat, and then I'll take it to him.'

The Cardiazol forces her to obey and eases her resignation.

The Down Below pavilion is the promised land. It heralds arrival at the gates of Eden, and of Jerusalem, and it holds the door to freedom. The two Doctors Morales are God the Father and God the Son. When she recovers some lucidity, her nurses will take her to the Down Below pavilion, as the Third Person of the Trinity, for without a woman, the Trinity makes no sense whatsoever.

'And the woman? I have to be the woman. The Holy Spirit is a female dove.'

From her perch on top of the wardrobe, Leonora tackles flight as the dove she is.

Frau Asegurado returns Leonora's possessions to her, confiscated when she first entered the pavilion.

'I have to get to work with them to combine the various solar systems and regulate the conduct of the world.'

A collection of French coins represents the fall of men due to their covetousness. Her quill, empty of ink, is her intelligence; her two bottles of Eau de Cologne are Jews and Nazis. Her little box with its

black-and-white lid containing *Tabu* face powder is the eclipse. Two bottles of creamy lotion are man and woman. Her nail file is her talisman. As for the tube of lipstick called *Tangee*, no doubt that had to do with the conjuncture of word and colour.

Her various body parts lie on the floor and she neither knows how to piece them back together, nor what the key is to secure them from slipping away: an arm lies there, in the corner; her right leg, out in the corridor; her head rests on the bed. She yells out her ideas of how to end the war with all the strength in her lungs, and emphasises them with her facial grimaces and hand gestures while everyone else ignores her. After a while, Frau Asegurado tells her:

'You're pouring with sweat, you need to calm down straight away.'

Leonora feels uncontrollable longings to flee and gallop like the mare she is, until an annoyed Frau Asegurado calls Santos over, and the two of them get a grip on her:

'Sit down and recover your breath.'

Even Dr. Morales emerges from his office in irritation.

'Leave us alone for a moment, we already know how agile she can be. It is impossible to watch over her sixty seconds of every minute.'

'Don Luis, last night I dreamt that I was on top of a little hill in the Bois de Boulogne, watching a gymkhana. I waited until two large hitched horses leapt over the stockade, and headed towards me. As they did so, they turned from two into three horses, as a white colt joined them and then fell over to die at my feet. I am that colt.'

'The only equines we have here belong to the horsemen who turn up on Sundays. Now it's better for you to return to your bedroom,' answers the doctor.

Leonora decides on her own form of defence. She closes her eyes to avoid penetration by the most intolerable suffering: other people staring at her.

She keeps them shut for hours on end. Thus she expiates her exile from the rest of the world, it is the expression of her flight out of Egypt, as she calls the Covadonga pavilion, into China, the solarium. Shutting her eyes even allows her to put up with the pain of a second injection of Cardiazol, and she recovers so quickly that three days later she tells Frau Asegurado:

'Get me dressed. I have to go to Jerusalem to tell them what I've learnt.'

The nurse takes her out into the garden. She leaves her outside the Villa Pilar, the pavilion where the Prince of Monaco is tapping on his typewriter. As the landscape becomes more beautiful, she knows she is approaching the pavilion Down Below.

'I have triumphed,' she tells the German woman.

If she stands on the toilet, Leonora can peep out of the bathroom window and look out on the seaside cemetery where Don Mariano's daughter, Covadonga, is buried.

Piadosa and Frau Asegurada continue to take care of her. Don Luis informs her that for the time being it is no longer deemed necessary to administer further Cardiazol. Then he adds:

'This is going to be your home. Be sure to make yourself responsible for it.'

'At one point in my life, I knew how to speak Chinese, but now I don't even know where China is. Are the patients here Chinese or Jewish?'

Leonora answers her own question, deciding that the occupants are Jews and that she is here in the asylum to take revenge on behalf of Max and everyone else she saw behind the wire fence at Les Milles.

José, the nurse, arranges to meet Leonora at their rendezvous as far away as possible from the main garden.

'Leonora, where on earth are you?' calls her nurse.

Hurriedly, hurriedly, kisses fall from the corners of their mouths. There is never enough time.

'Kiss me again before they discover us.'

How awkward it is to be kissing with the enemy lying in wait!

José gives her cigarettes.

'If you weren't so dotty, I'd marry you.'

26. NANNY

DON LUIS ANNOUNCES NANNY'S ARRIVAL from England. After a fortnight's journey in a cramped cabin aboard a warship, Nanny reaches the asylum disorientated and in a state of exaltation difficult to control. 'Who on earth had the idea to send an elderly employee who speaks not a word of Spanish to Santander?' the Morales ask each other. Nanny scurries from one side of the room to the next like a scared rabbit, with no-one so much as offering her a cup of tea.

Leonora, who knows how to be hurtful, receives her mistrustfully.

'My parents sent you here in a yellow submarine so that you would take me back to Hazelwood, is that it? If they're so worried, why didn't they come for me themselves?'

'Prim, I came here because I love you and I haven't seen you in four years. Where do you think I might find a cup of tea?'

'Go off back to England. They might give you one there.'

Leonora's hostility only grows more acute. Nanny hears her cough, and tries to bring her a glass of water but, not knowing where to find the kitchen, she gets lost. Every time she plumps up the pillows, Leonora curls up and turns her back on her. Nanny wants to supplant the nurse, and Leonora delights in the inability of this diminutive, wrinkled old woman, her grey hair knotted in a bun on her neck, to do so. She does not ask how she got to be there, whether she may be hungry or tired, where she'll sleep. The only thing bothering Leonora is to find out why she has come. 'What are you here for? My father sent you.' Let the Carringtons all drop dead! Nanny drags her back to her childhood and her presence intensifies the confusion inside her head. 'Behave, Prim, behave,' she tells her every time she pushes her food away. If she cries or throws a tantrum, Nanny sits down on the edge of her bed:

'Prim, when you used to want something, you always knew full well how to fight to get it.'

Occasionally she mentions the name of Black Bess, her pony, or Winkie, her mare, or of Tim Braff, the chauffeur's son, whom she had held in affection. 'He's married now, and his wife is expecting a child.' Or of Lassie, the dog whom Harold especially favoured, and who now lies beneath the ground, or of the new bishop, who wishes to modernise Church services and has Republican sentiments, for he knew Julian Bell, Virginia Woolf's nephew. How intense she is, how fresh is her memory, how irresistible the attachment to childhood! Gerard, Pat and Arthur's faces dance in her mind, cloud her vision.

'Hush now, Nanny.'

Acutely wounded by her mistress' behaviour, Nanny retreats with

her tail between her legs.

‘Nanny is a woman lacking either significance or authority,’ opines Frau Asegurado. Mortified at finding her place at Leonora’s side taken, the nanny becomes jealous and makes one mistake after another. ‘Let me do it, I can take care of her, I know her better, her parents sent me here to do this,’ and the only outcome is that Leonora refuses even to let her come into the bathroom with her.

Nanny irritates Leonora with her overflowing tenderness and her furrowed brow. Her eyes fill with tears at every rejection, which further exasperates her mistress. What is this slow emissary from the past doing here, turning up to impose restrictions, taking her by the hand as she used to do when Leonora was a child, in order to drag her back to Lancashire? She feels a sense of revulsion whenever Nanny so much as takes her arm:

‘Don’t you dare touch me. You are the Carringtons’ accomplice.’

Leonora treats Nanny in exactly the same manner as she was treated when she entered the asylum: she humiliates her. The only thing missing are the Cardiazol injections.

‘I came here to help you. Why is this German woman always interfering, Prim?’ Nanny asks.

‘Because she is a professional nurse and you’re not.’

‘But I’ve known you since you were a child.’

‘Nanny, stop it, you’re making me nervous.’

For Leonora, Nanny’s jealousy is translated into a cosmic problem, as insoluble as all the rest. The first one concerns her transfer to the Down Below pavilion, where the residents are always happy, since they know they will soon be set free.

In St. Martin d’Ardèche she used to dare to appear nude, sure of her beauty, but now she is a skeleton. You could count her ribs; her skin is taut across her collarbones; her hip bones resemble coat hangers; and her sunken stomach disgusts her, while her hollowed cheeks make her face look like a dried apricot.

‘Whatever have they done to me?’

The yellow skin stretched over her cheekbones looks as if it is on the point of cracking open.

‘I look like Frankenstein’s monster.’

Nanny weeps.

‘Your snivelling puts me on edge! Either shut up or clear off and cry somewhere else. I don’t want to listen to you, go back to Lancashire.’

Leonora’s narcissism means that her world revolves entirely around herself.

‘You have changed so much,’ Nanny laments, ‘you are no longer the Prim I knew since the day you were born.’

‘If I am no longer the same, what on earth are you still doing here? Clear off!’

‘Quite aside from coming on your parents’ behalf, I am here because I love you, Prim.’

Leonora’s rage is so immense she cannot manage to conceal it. She longs to pulverise Nanny and trample her ashes into the ground, to obliterate her very existence.

‘You are not allowed to come into the garden with me.’

‘Why not, Prim?’

‘Because my companion has to be Frau Asegurado.’

Each morning at eleven, when Leonora goes out with her German nurse, she ensures that Nanny is occupied with another task, so that she cannot follow her out.

Clearly, her nanny gets in her way.

‘I don’t want to have to think about you. If I can hardly cope with myself, how am I going to put up with your jealousies?’

Berating her has its compensations, since through Nanny she can get at her father, and be sure to offend him. If Nanny thinks she still has any kind of a hold over her, she has another think coming. There was a reason for her to be around during Leonora’s childhood, but no more.

Nanny has lost her powers, she has dwindled to nothing and is no more than a loose thread from the past. Humiliating her makes Leonora an accomplice of the Doctors Morales. If she submits to the doctors, they will transform from being her executioners to becoming her allies, and set her free.

Never in her worst nightmares did Nanny ever imagine that Prim would betray her.

‘There is no way I am going to return home with you, do you understand? Hazelwood is over. Now my goal is Down Below.’

Next to the Down Below pavilion, the garden opens out and, most importantly, a door leads into the garage, which Leonora spies on to see when Don Luis comes home and parks his car there. A few steps on and a cave serves as a storage space for the gardeners’ tools and a heap of the dried leaves they have swept up. In her mind, the pile of dead leaves is Covadonga’s grave, where the director’s daughter — who is also Luis Morales’ sister — lies.

‘They believe that I am Covadonga,’ Leonora says to herself. ‘I have come to replace his daughter. That is why they want to make this place my sepulchre.’

As well as an automobile, the Morales have a private dining room. At midday a nauseating smell permeates Leonora’s bedroom. The gardeners are spreading manure on the lawn. Leonora cannot comprehend how Mariano Morales, God the Father, gives his consent

to her food being thus contaminated. She rises indignantly and, followed by her nurse, enters the private refectory. The two doctors ignore Leonora's impertinence and Don Luis addresses Frau Asegurado in German. Leonora is irritated by the fact that he only speaks to the nurse and only in German. She seats herself between the two of them, and is crossed by an electric current flowing from one to the other. When she gets up the current switches off. 'This current is the flow of their fear of me.'

The doctors look at her with apprehension; in the asylum, fear travels from one person to another: the insane are capable of anything, so the doctors tranquillise them with injections. Cardiazol is also good at covering up the doctors' own shortcomings.

As Don Luis continues eating, Leonora asks José for pen and paper and draws the Cosmos (the father), the Sun (the son), and the Moon (herself). She holds the sheet of paper out to her doctor, who returns it to her without saying a word. Disappointed, Leonora goes to the library in the Villa Covadonga, chooses a book by Miguel de Unamuno, and opens it at random: 'Thank God we have pen and ink.' She is convinced that this is a message from the Cosmos.

A dragonfly lands on her hand, settling in place as if it never wishes to move on. Leonora looks at it without moving until it falls on to the floor tiles, dead.

'It is the hand of Don Luis who wants me dead. I shall be sure to anticipate his desire for me,' she assures the German nurse.

She endows anything that happens with a transcendental significance. If a sudden gust of wind blows the door open, it is because the garden is calling to her, and she must go out at once.

In order to go out walking, Don Luis gives her a cane which she looks after carefully as it is now her sceptre. Leonora's mind is filled with scenes from Alice and the Irish fairy stories in *The Crock of Gold.* She labours over three numbers that have come to obsess her — six, eight and two — and arrives at a total that reminds her of the consort queen, Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon.

'I am the Queen of England.'

'Tell that to the doctor!' growls Frau Asegurado.

Leonora runs to the consulting room:

'I am Elizabeth, Queen of England.'

'No, Leonor, you are Leonor Carrington, and you have no need to be queen of anywhere.'

'What I need is to get rid of all the characters I carry around in me, and the one I dislike most of all is Elizabeth of England.'

'Then leave, and be sure to exclude her from your life.'

She constructs an effigy of the queen in her room. A three-legged table for her legs; a chair poised on top of the table for her body, and

on top of the chair she places a decanter with three red roses in it: the crown and conscience of Queen Elizabeth. To top it off, she dresses it in her own clothes and places the table legs into some of Frau Asegurado's shoes.

Satisfied by the figure she has created, she runs into the garden and through a place she calls Africa, an enormous reed bed growing in the crater left by a hand grenade. She gathers their leafy plumed stems, which she uses to cover herself up completely, then wriggles on her stomach to the door, only to discover that it is firmly locked. She returns to the pavilion in a state of high sexual excitement. So it seems to her entirely natural to find Don Luis standing in front of the effigy of Queen Elizabeth of England.

'Congratulations: to pull out inner characters that are inessential to one's core is a symptom only of sanity.'

Don Luis caresses her cheek, then introduces one of his fingers into her mouth, which clearly gives her pleasure. Leonora becomes excited. He picks up his prescription book and rips out a page:

'A palace or a pigsty, anything but mediocrity.' From that moment on, Leonora starts to desire him, and writes to him every day. 'Doctor, what does it mean to be reborn? Something is growing inside me. You are responsible for provoking what is happening within me.' 'Doctor, do you think I've made good progress and can now move to the pavilion Down Below?' 'Open the door to me. I'm alone.' 'I am yearning for you.' 'I am not a woman, I am a mare.' 'There's no-one else in this garden apart from you and I, Doctor. Take me now or I'll go mad.' 'My madness is my unconsummated desire.' 'I can't stand myself, look at the state I am in, consumed with desire.' 'I admit defeat, you and the rest of them are all stronger than I am.' 'Who would believe that you could inflict such torture upon me?' 'I am your slave. I am the weakest woman in the world, and I am here only to serve you, I can satisfy all your desires, whatever they are, I'll lick your shoes.' 'I am prepared to die for you.'

Luis Morales stays quiet and avoids meeting her alone.

'Are you going to take a holiday from yourself, or have you become as mad as your patients?' Leonora asks him five days later, from her perch on top of the wardrobe.

Dishevelled, agitated, having lost his self-control, the doctor goes hither and thither accompanied only by his dog, Moro. Leonora suspects that at this point in time Moro has all the powers of his master, and that were she to try and escape the dog could prevent her. She is happy at the thought Don Luis has gone mad.

'How does it feel to be on the other side, Doctor?'

'Give the Englishwoman a bath, that should calm her down.'

Frau Asegurado gives her a cold bath and puts her to bed.

Leonora reflects on this: ‘They are preparing me for my wedding night. Although his face belongs to that of his dog Moro, the doctor has the body of a man.’ She closes her eyes and now the doctor has Moro’s body. ‘This is all for my triumphal entrance into Down Below.’ The doorway is lit with an orange light, so marvellous that Leonora has a presentiment of the exit. Later, José brings her her cigarette and gives her a goodnight kiss.

She has slept for twenty-four hours, no doubt about it: an old man is observing her, he is the director of the asylum, the lord of hallucinations, the owner and master of the inferno. The pupils in his eyes resemble Don Luis’. Mariano Morales speaks to her politely in French, something to which she has still not grown accustomed.

‘Do you feel better, Mademoiselle? I no longer recognise the lioness who arrived here forty days ago. You have become a lady.’

The old man orders them to take her to the solarium. Leonora obeys like a lamb going to slaughter. Awakening to the life of the sanatorium, following the shock treatment, is far worse than being tied up.

Leonora dreams that plants grow out of her hands, then twine all around her body. Max painted her in the middle of the jungle when they were in St. Martin d’Ardèche and when she saw the completed canvas she felt afraid: ‘Your creepers and branches will devour me.’

She forgets to remind Don Luis to cure her leg, which continues to be inflamed, and gets involved in a heated political debate in the course of which she insults Franco. While she rages, she finds herself in a garden similar to the one she dreamt of the night before, sitting on the ground, washed and dressed:

‘I can do as I wish, thanks to my wisdom and my philosopher’s staff,’ she tells him contentedly.

‘Then turn me into the best doctor in all the world,’ jokes Don Luis.

‘Set me free and you will be. Don Luis, I used to live outside reality and I never learnt then how to taste the essence of suffering. It is only since coming here that I have learnt what it means.’

‘You are the author of your own suffering, so take responsibility for it.’ The doctor’s smile vanishes.

‘Oh yes? Then who are these executioners?’

27. DOWN BELOW

DON MARIANO GIVES HER leave to move to Down Below.

Nanny, frightened at the thought of residing in the section where the mad have most freedom, tries to dissuade her: 'It's a bad place, a very dangerous place.' She is terrified of meeting the inmates allowed out into the garden. 'I'm not going down below.' She is so insistent that Leonora fears she may be right.

'Doctor, if you could give me a canvas and some tubes of paint, I promise you I won't bother you again,' Leonora begs him.

Luis Morales sends out for a length of the worst-quality canvas and some paints, particularly red. Leonora avidly paints *Down Below*: a horse, a nude woman with the face of a bird, and another with wings, against a stormy background, a Pegasus on the point of taking flight. The most provocative personage of all is seated to one side, wearing red stockings, and hiding her face behind a Venetian carnival mask topped with ram's horns; she displays milky breasts overflowing her black corset. As if this weren't sufficient, she challenges the viewer by exhibiting her luxuriant white thigh and holds up a mask that could be of the face of Max Ernst. Working away at it both exhausts and emotionally stimulates Leonora. She paints night and day, like one possessed; Nanny is horrified by the sensuality of the scene.

Morales pays no attention to the nanny. It's awkward for him to find her a role. He knows enough English to be able to talk to her, but doesn't make any attempt to do so.

They provided Nanny with a medical report detailing Leonora's treatment, and Luis Morales finds it hard to credit that the owner of Imperial Chemical would have confided such an errand to a creature so advanced in years, who seems so inferior to him. Yet here she is, standing before him, awaiting his response. Behind her stands the commercial empire that is Harold Carrington's Imperial Chemical, that Harold Carrington who sends money over from England and imperiously enquires as to the diagnosis. Hysteria? Schizophrenia? He demands a report. Luis Morales pontificates pompously by way of reply:

'We apply an electro-convulsive therapy which returns our patients to normality.'

'Rather like a slap in the face?'

'Yes, or a bucket of cold water.'

'What are the consequences? In my view, Leonora seems very poorly to me.'

'Up until now we have always obtained very good results.'

Nanny recalls the Prince of Monaco, who thinks he is tutor to Cayetana de Alba, or the Marquess Da Silva, who claims to be friends with King Alfonso Xlll, and ponders where to look for these purportedly good results. What is happening to Leonora is vile. Even though Nanny has only the vaguest idea as to the degree of Leonora's suffering, she is filled with horror in the face of such brutal procedures.

'When she arrived from Madrid she was a piece of human junk. Her improvement, which you seem unable to notice, is obvious,' Don Luis boasts.

'So what is in the report?'

'We employ the latest and most innovatory neuro-psychiatric techniques and we shall be in touch with the great Hungarian doctor, Ladislas J. von Meduna, who invented the drug Metrazol, for use in cases such as Miss Carrington's. We have made great progress with her, and our treatment is the most modern in all Europe.'

'And it's the same method you use on the rest of your patients who look so poorly? Your method is degrading and, were they here with us now, Mr. and Mrs. Carrington would never permit its use on their daughter.'

Don Luis feels a bilious twisting in his guts. What a bitch the old creature has turned out to be! But he has no need to take action against her; it's enough for him to keep on treating the patient.

Leonora cannot bear Nanny's naivety, and even the chambermaids confirm how she paces back and forth without managing even to respond to a simple greeting.

'I want to be where I can see who comes and goes here!' she yells.

'Yelling is a form of cathartic liberation, it helps the patient to feel better, but I beseech you not to indulge in it at table.'

'It's that I've just seen your sister — Covadonga — come in.'

'Impossible! But in any case, it is better for you to yell than to remain repressed.'

'I have never been repressed.'

'Oh no? I can demonstrate to you that you have, and I shall assist you in discovering how it was so, but verbally.'

'What does that mean?'

'You may repeat the yelling scene you have just acted out, but now do so calmly and consciously.'

'I am not dependent on anyone, least of all upon my parents; I am an isolated phenomenon. My parents are nothing to me.'

'Look here, Leonora, you need to stop searching for magic formulas which will take you to the root of your own suffering, and instead work hard on drawing it all out from within.'

'You're the one trying to drag my soul out of me with all your

treatments. You are a soulicide, an assassin of souls.'

'What use is such hostility to you, Leonora? It is easy to accept the rational reasons that brought you here, such as the war, the bombings, death and Max's abandonment of you. What is impossible to comprehend is your current attitude.'

'Max did not abandon me. Who knows in what concentration camp he may now be found?'

'What more could you have done, Leonora? Did you not go as far as Les Milles with him?'

'When did I tell you that? Since I've been here, I've never once opened my mouth.'

'Don't lose your trust in me. Look at yourself and remember how you were when you arrived here, see how pretty you look now with your hair up and your complexion clear.'

'All that is down to Piadosa and José … Well, and in the end also to Nanny.'

'Our work here is to change dysfunctional forms of behaviour, and we teach self-discipline.'

'I don't believe in self-discipline, I believe in inspiration.'

'For now, try and smoke less, as it is bad for your lungs.'

'It is the one thing that can calm me down.'

'I advise that every time you lift a cigarette to your lips, you should put the lit end in your mouth for a few seconds.'

Leonora puts the cigarette in her mouth, and the doctor counts up to fifteen seconds.

'Take that cigarette out, you are going to burn yourself! Never ever have I seen such a thing!'

'Did I never tell you that I am a faqir, a lover of the great Indian cockroach?'

Don Luis proposes she make her first excursion out of the asylum, and takes her out in his car. On one avenue they encounter a group of soldiers who sing: '¡Ay, ay ay! No te mires en el río …' When she gets back, Nanny greets her with her staff in her hand.

'I took it to protect myself from the mad inmates.'

'How could you contemplate using my dearest treasure, my most precious means of wisdom, for such a purpose? I loathe you more than ever before.'

Don Luis gives her permission to withdraw books from the library.

Euphoric before so many books, Leonora stretches out a hand to remove one from its shelf. But the presence of her nurse standing behind her prevents Leonora from taking the volume she has selected. Leonora throws all the books she can grab on to the floor, and plants herself in front of the doctor, who arrives in a state of high alarm.

‘I don’t recognise the power of any of you over me! Frau Asegurado refused to let me choose. I am not her personal property. I have my own thoughts, my own values. I do not belong to you.’

The doctor takes her by the arm, and Leonora realises with horror that he is going to administer a third dose of Cardiazol. ‘No doctor, please don’t!’ She flings herself on the floor and swears to do all she possibly can, anything he wants her to do. Don Luis pulls her up, and as he drags her down the corridor, she seizes a little flask of eucalyptus oil and secretes it in her palm. ‘This will help me now.’

The room, decorated with a wallpaper of silver pine trees on a red background, induces a new panic in her.

She is determined to muster all her strength to resist the moment of the electric shock.

They bring her back to her room in a cataleptic condition. Nanny keeps repeating: ‘What have they done to you … what have they done to you?’ and weeps at her bedside.

Rather than touch her, Nanny’s presence exasperates her. She can feel a paternal suction transmitted through her.

Don Mariano advises the old woman, Mary Kavanaugh: ‘I think it would be better for you to return to England.’

‘I can see that they’re driving her mad.’

The old man gazes at her in solidarity. She is a woman the same age as himself and is clearly a brave one, having crossed the seas in the midst of war to be there; her life has been consumed in caring for other people’s children.

‘That was the last dose of Cardiazol,’ he compassionately informs her.

Nanny’s departure comes as a huge relief.

Leonora sleeps through a complete eight-hour cycle. For the first time in many months, she feels serenely at peace. Bathed, her hair combed and her face washed, her expression relaxes as she sits on a bench out of doors in the sun, next to Dr. Luis Morales. His prominent eyes express a truce, but Leonora daren’t lift a finger, for fear of breaking the spell. Luis Morales regards her sympathetically, and the sun falls lightly upon her shoulders. The woman now sitting in front of him is delicate, noble, intelligent, a very special patient indeed.

Even during her most violent attacks of rage, including the animal fury she experiences, set desperately on defending herself, there is always something supernatural which makes her stand out. How she hurled herself at the nurse from on top of the wardrobe, tearing at her hair and circling her neck in the crook of her arm! With what mastery did she succeed in avoiding being tied up by them! She was clearly fighting for something, something the others want to annihilate and which belongs to her alone.

‘Artists must be treated differently,’ Don Luis says to his father. ‘Hopefully painting can at least serve as a form of therapy. Do you know who Salvador Dalí is?’

The old doctor has not the least idea as to the significance of Surrealism and holds his peace. The son continues:

‘I believe this woman has lived through a terrible experience and we should consider passing her as fit.’

‘As yet she doesn’t have the strength to fit back into society.’

‘Which society would that be you’re referring to, Father? I would not dream of attempting to classify Leonora. Do you know what she said to me? “There is something I have to conserve inside myself, something that — if I let them destroy it — I could never recover”.’

‘She is still not ready to go out into the wide world,’ insists the old man.

Leonora has a cousin who is a doctor, a relative of the Moorheads, who works in a public sanatorium in Madrid. He learns of Leonora’s incarceration in Santander via the British Embassy there. ‘I shall go and see her tomorrow!’ he decides. Dr. Mariano Morales forbids visits to her but, as he is a doctor, he insists upon it.

Leonora sees a young man crossing the garden and heading towards her.

‘I am an Englishman, and I specialise in psychiatry.’

‘And I have power over the animals,’ Leonora confides in him.

‘That’s entirely natural in a person with your sensibilities.’

Leonora is seized by a great sense of jubilation. This man takes her seriously. It is as if, at that instant, someone were unlocking her mind: Leonora comprehends that Cardiazol is an injection; that Don Luis is not a wizard but a shameless charlatan; and that Covadonga, Pilar and Down Below are not Egypt, Amachu and Jerusalem, but pavilions for lunatics. The English psychiatrist demystifies the mystery, the hypnotic power of Van Ghent evanesces, and the Morales are no longer God the Father and his son Jesus Christ.

28. LIBERATION

THE MORALES DOCTORS, father and son, put her on the train to Madrid together with Frau Asegurada, her nurse. The date is the last day of 1940, and the temperature is so abysmal that it turns their skin blue and the train gets stuck for hours in Ávila. Another train is held on the adjacent track, its wagons laden with sheep bleating with cold.

'I'll remember the suffering of those sheep until the day I die.' Leonora buries her head in her hands.

Frau Asegurado stares out of the window.

'I was one of those sheep when I was in the Villa Covadonga,' and Leonora covers her ears.

In Madrid, they stay in a large and luxurious hotel, courtesy of Imperial Chemical. Impressed, Frau Asegurado permits her to attend a *thé dansant* held on the first floor of the hotel. The orchestra is playing Strauss waltzes. A man approaches, invites Leonora to dance and, when she is about to accept, Frau Asegurado intercepts her:

'You are allowed to watch the dancers, not to go dancing.'

'Or to drink?'

'That you may, and I shall bring the two glasses of Rioja I have just spotted on a tray.'

Much to her surprise, Leonora runs into Renato Leduc on the arm of a stunning blonde, to whom she at once recounts her Odyssey.

'I am accompanied here by a nurse, Frau Asegurado, you can see her sitting over there, a glass of wine in her hand. They locked me up in an asylum in Santander and cured me with three doses of Cardiazol, the equivalent of three electro-convulsive treatments. My father ordains my fate, and he still wants me at his side in England. I would prefer to die than let him continue to control me.'

'We have to do something!' The blonde is on the point of tears.

'Where are you going after Madrid, for the love of God, Renato?'

Frau Asegurado approaches, glass in hand.

They converse in French, so that she can't understand them.

'Come and find me at the Mexican Embassy in Lisbon,' Leduc replies.

Leonora sleeps much more soundly, despite her nurse's snoring.

Next morning the British consul and the director of the Madrid branch office of Imperial Chemical reappear, wreathed in smiles, and invite her to dinner.

They bid one another farewell with a hug. Without doubt, wine works miracles and the nurse forgets her role as torturer.

The Madrid director of Imperial Chemical can't do too much for Leonora.

‘Please, eat.’

They are apprehensive at her recent release from the asylum, and Leonora notices how the manager’s wife jumps at seeing her pick up her cutlery. Harold Carrington’s daughter does everything not to fall apart. ‘I’ve got them terrified.’

‘It would appear that I am something of a cause for alarm to Madrid’s high society,’ Leonora says, knife in hand. The director of Imperial Chemical invites her to dinner again, this time without the company of his wife.

‘This is the best restaurant in Madrid.’

He smiles at her. Leonora orders turbot in champagne sauce.

‘Your family has decided to send you to South Africa, to a sanatorium where you will be very happy.’

‘I am not so sure about that.’

‘I myself have a different suggestion: I could buy you a flat here and visit you frequently.’ He places his hand on her thigh.

The alternatives are horrible: either she is embarked for South Africa, or else she has to bed this horrific man. In order to buy time, Leonora flees to the bathroom.

When they leave the restaurant at the end of the evening, the director tries to embrace her.

‘Come close, let me cover you up from the cold.’

Once outside, a terrific blast of wind unhinges the metal advert hanging over the restaurant and it falls right at her feet.

‘It could have killed you!’ His hug becomes even tighter.

‘No, my answer is still no,’ and Leonora pulls away.

‘Then go to hell! You’ll be sent to Portugal and from there on to South Africa.’

‘Portugal?’

The British consul and the director of Imperial Chemical put her on the train together with her documents, which seem to have magically reappeared. Leonora repeats to them both:

‘I am going neither to South Africa, nor to another sanatorium!’

At the station she is received by a delegation from Imperial Chemical: two men who look like policemen, and a woman with a vinegary expression.

‘You’re in luck, you’ll be living in the prettiest house in Estoril until your boat sets off to South Africa.’

‘It will be wonderful.’

Leonora has learnt how to use cunning to overcome the enemy.

The house in Estoril, a few kilometres outside Lisbon, has a bath tub you cannot fill with more than a centimetre of water, and two parrots jabbering in their cage. She spends the night devising her means of escape, and at breakfast she tells the vinegary woman:

‘It has turned very cold, and I need to keep warm. So I need to buy a hat and a new pair of gloves.’

‘Of course, no-one goes out without gloves and a hat at this time of year,’ agrees the vinegary woman.

On descending from the train in Lisbon, she sees a café. ‘It’s now or never,’ she thinks to herself. ‘I have only moments in which to act.’

‘I need to go to the toilet.’

She prays to the entire heavenly host that the café has a back door.

The vigilant minder awaits her at their table.

Leonora has got it right and the café has another exit, towards which she immediately heads. She is even more in luck, for a member of the heavenly host delivers up a taxi at precisely the right moment.

‘To the Mexican Embassy.’

She pays the driver with the money for her gloves.

At the Embassy she uses her asylum-learnt Spanish to enquire:

‘Might Renato Leduc happen to be in today?’

‘He doesn’t have a strict time of arrival.’

‘Then I shall sit down and wait for him.’

‘But, young lady …’

‘The police are after me!’

Several people are staring at her. At that moment, Emmanuel Fernández, the Mexican consul, opens his office door.

‘You are on Mexican territory and you enjoy diplomatic immunity for as long as you are here. Your compatriots cannot lay a finger on you,’ the consul assures her.

Is what follows true or is it a fairy story? Nobody maltreats her and the best of all is when Renato appears, and makes obvious his compassion for her.

‘Your troubles are over, Leonora, you need to unwind, and in order for this to happen you need a good meal and a good night’s sleep.’

He takes her to her hotel. Next morning, breakfast with Renato is sheer delight. Light-hearted and witty, his mere presence is enlivening and the horizon opens before her like the parting of the Red Sea before Moses. Leonora launches herself into a full gallop.

29. RENATO LEDUC

LEONORA HAD FOUND RENATO attractive ever since they first met in Paris, and he seems all the more so now, when her empathy for him becomes absorbed by his capacity to save her.

She finds his Mexican-inflected French accent particularly pleasing.

'I was taught to speak French by my father, and I would always talk in it with him. In addition, I have always enjoyed travel — on foot, on horseback, by train, by bicycle, by any means of transport whatsoever. It's something I carry in my blood. In another life, I think I must have been a cloud.'

Over the next few days, he surprises her with his sparkle, and the way he murmurs a poem into her ear, something that already feels like a ring upon her finger:

'Negra su cabellera, negra, negra,
negros sus ojos, negros como la fama de una suegra.'

Leonora laughs aloud.

'Have you ever had a mother-in-law?'

'No, Max had no mother.'

'Then you are quite right.'

Every day more men, women and entire families arrive at the Mexican Embassy, seeking safe conducts to leave the country. While Renato looks after them, Leonora goes on long walks, inhaling the salt air, smiling at the seagulls in flight and smoking cigarettes. The hotel where they are staying is clean, just like Renato. Clean in spirit. He asks nothing from her but offers to take her out to purchase canvas and tubes of paint, so that she can paint while they await their departure.

'Who knows how long we'll be stuck here? There are so many people waiting here and their situation is nothing if not depressing.'

'War destroys everything, doesn't it, Renato?'

'Yes indeed,' he responds gravely, as if she were a little girl.

Lisbon is a port of exit and not one solitary refugee more can squeeze in. The streets are crammed with people awaiting the journey as they smoke cigarettes and play blind man's buff, a perfect game for wartime. Leonora ventures into the market and is suddenly turned to stone: it cannot be, or else it has to be one of her hallucinations, so many people look alike. But this tall man with his white hair resembles Max so much, and his straight back is surely identical to Max's. That the gentleman is weighing a hammer in his hand just as Max would draws her magnetically towards him and he, on looking round, causes Leonora to tumble into the depths of his fishy eyes. Max

Ernst gazes at her with identical astonishment. Neither makes the least movement towards the other: not he, hammer in hand, nor she, cigarette in hand; they measure up to each other, as if stricken with terror.

At long last, Max sets down the hammer and takes her by the hand. The knots in his throat are loosened and he tells her that on emerging from the camp at Les Milles he set out in search of her. Yes, yes, he did find her note on the kitchen table at their house in St. Martin d'Ardèche: 'Dear Max, I've left with C. and I'll wait for you in Extremadura.'

'You went without taking a single thing with you, and you left the house in the charge of a wholly unscrupulous innkeeper. You abandoned the lot and the lot has been lost.'

'Nothing is lost, if we have found one another.' Leonora is trembling, but Max is not listening to her.

'I went back to St. Martin d'Ardèche and you weren't there,' he insists.

'How did the vineyards seem to you?'

'They were in a lamentable state, they had been left to languish, that is just how the French wine-makers are. Not a single bottle of our wine was left, either. I stayed there, at St. Martin, for a few days, rolled up some of my canvases, and brought what I could with me. Alphonsine kept repeating: '*Elle a perdu la tête*.' You stopped by her café and called out that you were fleeing for Spain with another couple. Why didn't you wait for me, Leonora?'

'I didn't know if you would come back, and the very thought of your not doing so made me ill. If Catherine and Michel had not come for me, you would have found me there, still waiting.'

'So, instead of awaiting me, you vanished?'

'Fine, and what did you do?' Leonora interrupted him, lighting up another cigarette.

'I was in hiding, gathering up the canvases and, as soon as I could, leaving for Marseilles, to take refuge in the Villa Air-Bel. Kay Sage, Yves Tanguy's wife, asked Peggy Guggenheim to fund my journey to New York, along with bringing out Breton, Jacqueline and Aube. And I asked Peggy if she would recover the sculptures and bas-reliefs from St. Martin d'Ardèche. Since she had seen pictures of them in the *Cahiers d'Art*, she took an oath before a lawyer that they were worth at least 175,000 francs, and rescued what she could. I definitely have at least two of your paintings here with me, *The Inn of the Dawn Horse* and your large portrait of *Loplop, the Superior Bird*.'

'Paintings?'

'Yes. Or don't you remember that we are painters?'

Leonora cannot believe it, although perhaps she doesn't realise

the implications. Max doesn't ask her about herself, about all she has suffered, or about the asylum in Santander. Max talks about himself compulsively, enumerating all the canvases he has retrieved, and the one which still remains incomplete: *Europe After the Rain.* He recalls each and every one of the figures sculpted on the walls of St. Martin d'Ardèche, one with the fish on its head, another with a hat, that of the minotaur.

'They even removed the bench I had painted, trampled the bas-relief into the ground, broke down the painted door. Only the bas-relief can be restored.'

He is insistent on the point that it was she who abandoned their house. His blue eyes cloud over, his gestures become increasingly abrupt. He orders one coffee after another.

'And the cats, Max, whatever happened to the cats?'

'Who cares about the cats?' Max grows still more irritable.

Leonora tries to light her cigarette but cannot find the lighter inside her handbag, any more than she can her locate her true *raison d'être*. She rummages as Max continues to lecture, his one and only topic being art, and he communicates with such iciness that Leonora starts to tremble.

'Max, let me go to my hotel, I think I am feeling ill.'

'I'll accompany you there. I have to go to the station to pick up a friend, anyway.'

Back in her room, Leonora throws herself on to her bed, and hides her head under the pillow. She doesn't realise that Max has gone to meet Peggy Guggenheim and that at that very moment, his face a death mask and his voice strangulated, Max is taking his patron by the arm before manoeuvring her to one side as he says, almost before she has had time to set foot on the platform:

'Something dreadful has occurred. I've found Leonora.'

'How delightful for you.' Peggy rises to the challenge.

They go to their hotel and try to act naturally, opening several bottles of wine. At midnight Max asks Peggy to accompany him on a walk. 'I've found her, I've found her,' he repeats at every step, as if he were driving hammer blows into the back of Peggy's neck.

'It's as if you neither see nor hear a thing!' Max complains, since Peggy makes no reply.

'What do you want me to understand by this, Max? You and I … I don't know what we are. Is there anything between us?'

Max stays silent. The person paying his passage to the United States is Peggy, the woman who shares his bed is Peggy.

'Let's meet Leonora,' Peggy proposes to Max.

'You have met her before.'

'Well, then let's meet her again,' the patron corrects herself.

They drink tea and Leonora talks about the ‘Mexican’ with whom she is to be married, or has already become married.

‘I would do anything in the world to escape from Imperial Chemical and Harold Carrington. What I most want is to live at the ends of the earth, so that my parents cannot find me,’ says Leonora fiercely.

‘The United States are at the end of the world,’ Max says with weighty emphasis, as taut as a bow, desire writ large across his face. His gigantic blue eyes pursue Leonora and register her slightest move. She affects not to notice, orders more tea, and treads on Peggy’s foot.

From that night on, the millionairess moves into her own room.

‘Like any good Latin, Renato is jealous,’ Leonora divulges.

Peggy offers to invite him to dinner, revealing just the smallest sign of her desire for revenge on Max, and Leonora accepts.

‘He can only be free in the evening, he’s at work all day long.’

‘Is he an ambassador?’ Peggy enquires.

‘No, he’s the Second Consul.’

Leonora shakes hands with Peggy, inserts a carnation into the buttonhole of Max’s jacket, and kisses him.

‘Even if the war drives everyone mad, no-one will ever be as fragile as Leonora,’ Max comments as they walk back to their hotel.

‘And because I have money that means I’m not fragile, right?’ Peggy asks.

Their way back is miserable. Max doesn’t even offer her his arm. He precedes her, swathed in his black cloak, wholly wrapped up in his own thoughts.

There are no vacancies in any hotel and people are gathering in the cafés to wait; after a pause they get up and resume walking around, perhaps to another café to continue waiting. After two or three hours they return to where they started from, as though playing musical chairs. Peggy stays with her children Sindbad and Pegeen, in the Hotel Frankfurt-Rossio, but her spite is so extreme that she takes refuge in the arms of her ex-husband and the father of her children, Laurence Vail; and he tells her that he intends to cancel his journey to the United States.

‘I shall stay in Britain and assist the Royal Air Force. My services are needed as a pilot.’

‘Don’t be so irresponsible! Sindbad and Pegeen, all our friends — they rely on you! I rely on you!’

And Laurence Vail takes Peggy in his arms.

Leonora not only crosses Peggy’s path, but also that of Laurence Vail and his second wife, the artist and writer Kay Boyle, the five children they have between them — two of Peggy’s and three of Kay’s — and, above all, of Peggy’s latest official lover: Max Ernst.

Whereas once magnetic fields joined them together, now the war unhinges them, they fight and forgive, drink and embrace, love with passion and the next day no longer remember the reason for their fits of rage or ecstasy, nor even with whom they spent the night. Each holds intimate memories of the personal life of the other, and their mutual confidences are eschatological; let everyone look at them, let everyone know how and who they are, what they are worth. Their sole *raison d'être* is to shine like stars, the only secret they keep under lock and key is that of their income.

There is much talk of Varian Fry and the Villa Air-Bel in Marseilles, a vast house that Breton baptised with the name of the Villa Esper Visa.

'Why did they give it that name?' asks Leonora in all innocence.

'Because that's all we did there: wait for a visa. Haven't you noticed how difficult it is to obtain a visa for Spain or Portugal?'

'Tell that to Peggy …'

'Peggy can …'

'Peggy is about to receive a deposit from the Bank of America.'

'So if you make yourself amenable, Peggy will make it happen for you, too.'

'Listen, you know that Peggy paid for André Breton and his wife Jacqueline, along with their daughter Aube, to set out for Martinique aboard the *Paul Lemerle*, and is now paying for ten passages on the clipper from Lisbon to New York.'

As Peggy's first husband, Laurence Vail qualifies as the group's leader, choosing where they are to eat, drink, converse, argue and yell at one another. They are continuously out partying, and the more he comes to loathe their raves, the less he wishes to leave them.

His retinue floats on the crest of a wave, and the leitmotif of their existence is how to make money as they do in the United States. Kay Boyle, on the point of separating from Laurence, talks of nothing but a prisoner whom she intends to spring from a concentration camp.

Naturally, the topic currently at the top of their list concerns the pale Englishwoman whom Max has only just met up with again: Leonora, who lived with him in St. Martin d'Ardèche.

'Her family want to get her out of the way, and send her to another psychiatric clinic, this time in Cape Town,' Max confides in a low voice.

'To where?' Peggy pursues with vengeance.

'To an a-sy-lum in South Africa. Which makes her fear her father even more than the Nazis.'

Renato works in the Mexican Embassy and one night he turns up at the Leão d'Ouro, where Guggenheim is installed with her retinue. Peggy is greatly impressed by this man with his long legs, tanned

complexion and grey-streaked hair, who addresses everyone in impeccable French. He has much political news to impart on Portugal, France, Spain, and even the United States. They all besiege him with questions.

Wine glasses are filled and refilled; those who once were married become accomplices again, and clink glasses to sharing their compromising information. The new arrivals have the shine of novelty about them.

'Your Mexican is gorgeous, get me one like him,' says Peggy.

Renato flirts, raises his glass, drinks, smiles, and Leonora feels supported. But of course Max detests him because, even though he and Leonora might spend the whole day together, she spends every night with 'the Mexican'.

'The war brings us all the more together,' says the slender Kay Boyle, who takes Leonora under her wing and always tries to ensure that they are seated next to one another.

Kay comes from a rich family back in the United States. She has a nose almost as impressively large as the rest of her, and talks without pause of the concentration camps and the reign of terror that seem to be the Nazis' main source of inspiration. She wants to bring her imprisoned friend to the United States and her husband, Laurence Vail, informs her that the captive could well weigh anchor in the *Winnipeg*, departing from Marseilles, rather than with them.

'I don't understand why your lover has to travel on an airline ticket paid for by my ex-wife.'

Marcel Duchamp and Herbert Read advised Peggy on which works to acquire for her collection, which has set sail for New York.

'I've heard some terrible news, Peggy,' Kay Boyle announces. 'The boat loaded with all your paintings was sunk.'

'Don't over-dramatise, Kay,' Laurence scolds her. 'You delight in saying things that have no existence outside your over-heated imagination. Better to employ it in writing.'

Laurence throws his glass at the wall, then picks up a plate and smashes it. Marcel Duchamp and Peggy, well accustomed to Laurence's scenes, stare at him unmoved, until Max decides to follow suit. Laurence was the King of Bohemia. Herbert Read removes another plate from his grasp, and Kay, usually so much mistress of herself, sobs loudly. They cry, laugh, insult one another and then are reconciled with, desire and then betray each other. Max Ernst is worried about the friends he left behind: Hans Bellmer and Victor Brauner.

'I want to help them,' he says, addressing Peggy.

'To me, your friends have no more existence than ghosts,' the patron replies.

Max becomes enraged.

'It's just that you mention the name of their concentration camps as if it were St. Moritz, Megève, Deauville, Eden Roc, Kitzbuhl, or any one of your other holiday destinations.'

In the course of lunches and then dinners, Leonora learns what happened to Max in the time since the gendarme took him away.

'Leonor Fini went to Marseilles to see Max, she is his spoilt brat. You know they were lovers, don't you? So, just as Jean Arp has two Sofias, so Max has two Leonoras, Fini and Carrington, and that's how he gets ahead in his career. Madame Fini has taken refuge in Monte Carlo, and is now painting pictures. She wanted to sell me a painting the size of a postcard for ten thousand dollars.'

'I find her vulgar and her conduct is that of a whore,' Laurence Vail intervenes.

'I don't appreciate her too much either, despite the fact that I like whores,' seconds Marcel Duchamp.

'Max adores her and wants me to adore her, too. He introduced her to me as a patron of the arts, not as his beloved.'

'Peggy, please.' Max seeks to defend himself.

'Max considers her a prodigy for no better reason than that she painted his portrait. He supports any young woman, who is sufficiently pretty and flattering. He is far less indulgent towards male artists!'

'Yet you have more than enough indulgence, don't you Peggy?' interrupts Kay.

Max advised her to deny her Jewish origins.

'I told the police my grandfather was Swiss and that I am an American. Since the United States had only just delivered a shipload of food to France, the inspectors treated me well.'

Peggy relates how Max needed fifty dollars in bank notes and went to borrow them from Chagall.

'I don't know a thing about money, go and talk to my daughter,' was how the Russian chose to excuse his way out of it.

Varian Fry, whom Max met in the street, at once took out sixty dollars, which he gave him. That was how he escaped from Marseilles with all his canvases under his arm, and got to Lisbon.

'Do you know there's a Hieronymus Bosch here in Lisbon?' Max asks Leonora. 'Would you like to go to the National Museum of Classical Art while Peggy is busy being the centre of attention?'

'Yes.'

The Temptation of St. Anthony draws them closer again and they promise themselves they will paint one of their own one of these days. Every single detail of the work of art painted nearly five hundred years ago leaves them speechless: the kingdom of devils, the adoration

of the Magi, the miniature dogs and pigs, the ruined tower that could have been the Tower of Babel, the couple flying on a fish to escape forever.

'Would you consider escaping with me on the back of a fish?'

30. THE RETINUE

PEGGY, LEONORA AND MAX arrange to go riding together.

'When I was a child,' Peggy relates, 'I had a terrible fall, but I jumped up and got back on to the horse, just as the rule book says, even with a broken jaw and several teeth missing.'

'Does that mean those teeth aren't yours?' Leonora pokes fun at her, since she finds Peggy ugly, despite her fine figure.

Peggy doesn't ride out with them again, but still sees Leonora quite frequently, since Max won't let go of her.

'Do you have to include her in all our breakfasts, lunches, walks and visits?' Peggy demands to know of him.

Peggy, the protector to whom he owes his life, presides over the table where everyone sits elbow to elbow with ex-husbands, ex-wives, lovers, and the offspring of prior relationships; a world of people gathered together for the purpose of drinking. Peggy is the person who offers them the most, while the rest laugh, psychoanalyse one another, discover magical and secret places, spend large fortunes, and regress to childhood. At noon on the dot they order their first cocktails — the women opting for port with ice, which rapidly renders them drunk — and when at long last day dawns, they take their drinks to bed for a nightcap. Presumably that's where they continue their *ménages à trois*. At noon they rise to start drinking all over again, before returning to bed for a siesta that can last all afternoon.

'Did you know that Niarchos — the Greek shipping magnate — had an el Greco hanging in his yacht?'

'How imprudent!' Peggy shrieks.

Kay insists that European works of art are at risk and that now, at this very minute, paintings from the Guggenheim collection could be in the jaws of a shark.

'Worse still, Franco couldn't care less if his lunch were served on a Picasso with a delicious salad of sunflowers.'

A different obsession was added to their terror of the Nazis: Leonora's incarceration in the asylum at Santander.

'I can understand that you might have lost your head,' Kay says. 'At the age of twenty-three it must be difficult to be living with a German genius, so far from your family, and in a strange country. In your situation I would have felt depressed, too. And what can be done in the face of war? One either dies or goes mad. I've spoken with Leonora and want to offer her protection.'

'She is all skin and bones and there is fear in her eyes when she looks at the rest of us,' says Laurence Vail.

‘If only that were all, but I see her getting up to all sorts of weird stuff,’ Kay Boyle goes on.

‘What kind of stuff?’

‘She is always hunting desperately in her bag for something or other. She smokes like a chimney and never stops looking behind her, as if she were constantly being pursued. I’ve also noticed how she rubs her hands in a kind of nervous tic, but at the same time she often loses her temper.’

‘She talks so nervously and seems to be very insecure,’ Marcel Duchamp adds.

‘Not all that insecure. Max doesn’t leave her alone for so much as a minute,’ Herbert Read defends her.

‘That’s also the effect of the asylum. Max feels responsible,’ insists Marcel.

‘Max loves her, you can see it from miles away,’ Kay exclaims.

‘Max owes his life to Peggy. I don’t think he’s that much of an idiot he would consider a woman straight out of an asylum could be of more use to him than Peggy,’ interrupts Laurence Vail.

‘It’s just that madness evacuates someone’s inner being and they become someone else,’ is Herbert Read’s opinion.

‘Leonora speaks in a different voice, it has a different rhythm, even the way she structures her sentences is different. It’s as if her way of speaking has become very dense. Herbert and I were talking about it only last night,’ concludes Laurence.

‘In any case, what’s absolutely obvious is that she has put all her trust in the Mexican,’ adds Kay Boyle.

‘Trust in the Mexican? That man has nothing whatsoever in common with her,’ Duchamp alleges.

‘He has to have something in common with her, since she sleeps with him,’ retorts Kay.

One morning, after bidding farewell to Renato, Leonora goes out alone. All of a sudden she sees a tall figure approaching, greeting her effusively:

‘Would you allow me to accompany you?’

The man is Herbert Read.

‘We met in London and you only had eyes for Ernst. Tell me, Leonora, what’s the first thing you look for when you meet someone new?’

‘I suppose it has to be talent, and a voice that strikes me as out of the ordinary.’

‘Regardless of any scandal?’

‘Yes. To me Peggy Guggenheim and her crowd, for all their love of scandal, is preferable to the conventionalism of the whole British Empire!’

Read is persuaded that society will never succeed in understanding the artist, this 'supreme egotist' condemned to love those who reject him. Art has nothing to do with either left or right wing, with the Communists or capitalists and, although they might seek to use an artist for their own ends, politicians will never succeed in adopting, overcoming or destroying it.

As they walk along, Read tells her that many Surrealists find their inspiration in nature, and look to it for fresh designs, as does Ernst with his forests. That is why they study the structures of minerals and vegetables, of biology and geometry. Max is a sage, passionate about astronomy, who investigates below and beyond the visible surface, to give his work a living and universal order.

'So … Surrealism is inspired by nature?' she asks.

'Of course. Tanguy once told me that while walking on the beach, he came across tiny marine organisms, and they gave his imagination a starting point for his next creative moment. Where do you derive your inspiration from?'

'I don't quite know how to explain, it's something as physical as eating, sleeping and making love.'

'And as for nature?'

'Nature exists outside of me. My art is deep inside,' and she holds her hands over her belly.

'Are you going to stay with Max?' he asks as solicitously as an elder brother.

Leonora assures him that she has finished with Max, yet she feels confused.

'It seems to me this is like *The Comedy of Errors*,' Read replies.

'Yes, you're right; Peggy is jealous of me and Max, even of Renato. We are living inside an absurd comedy, an operetta.'

'Life is a surrealist adventure.'

Herbert Read makes a mockery of the bourgeois values of British society. From his youth, he made fun of the elite's pastimes, society's codes of behaviour, and the importance accorded to titles and honours.

Leonora listens to him devoutly. To her, he seems a wholly unique individual. She would love to say to him: 'My mother gave me your book on Surrealism with the dust jacket designed by Max, and nothing would please me more than to be your friend.'

Among the crowd buzzing like flies around Peggy, Leonora feels most comfortable with the friendly, sensitive and thoughtful writer Kay Boyle, who interrogates her about her Mexican — as the group refer to him — and reassures her that he seems much more sensible than Max.

'The court around Peggy is wholly destructive.'

‘There’s nothing about her more destructive than her nose,’ Leonora tells her.

To the Englishwoman, Peggy’s nose is the ugliest in the world. Peggy herself had told her that hers was one of the very first cosmetic surgery operations undertaken in St. Louis, Missouri.

‘But, since nobody knows what her original nose looked like, there can be no means of comparison,’ adds Laurence sarcastically.

When Peggy confesses her blunders and embarrassments she suddenly looks more attractive, but to have eternally to play the centre of attention at the party would make even *il Poverello* — St. Francis of Assisi — loathsome. Peggy’s retinue is as phenomenal and repugnant as the courtesans who dress up buffoons between one caper and the next.

Max and Leonora separate from the group, so provoking the American woman’s jealousy, and she confides in Kay:

‘I am certain that Max is still in love with her.’

‘Don’t worry about it, you’re the one he really needs.’

Leonora walks for hours at Max’s side. They wander into churches, walk back and forth over the Plaza del Municipio and the Rua Augusta; with each step he returns to his old methods of seduction: no-one sees as he sees; no-one else understands how to look between the sun’s rays; no-one else gives the moon a sunhat; no-one else makes crystal wine glasses sing; no-one else offers such a range of possibilities.

Max makes her a present of a notebook he’s bought with Peggy’s money. They sketch elbow to elbow, they show one another the results, and Max reverts to being a tender, blond Infant Jesus, his eyes wide with innocence.

Ernst doesn’t let go of Carrington, night or day, rain or shine; he couldn’t care less how much suffering it causes Peggy. He longs to be able to hypnotise Leonora to regard him as she used to. Never in his life has he felt so in love. Having once lost her means he is now insistent, neurotic, on the verge of hysteria.

Peggy drinks.

‘To me, Lisbon is Hell,’ she confides in Kay Boyle. ‘Max doesn’t even speak to me.’

Lisbon is one vast crowd they could disappear into it if they wished; but Max wants them to see him. Leonora, with her pale face and black hair, is his trophy: he won her like the blind swimmer, and is now about to recover her, before they set out across the Atlantic.

At noon, they eat together with the rest of the group, in an orgy of sardines and port, and Leonora is scared by what she hears. If she was supposed to have once been insane, her new friends appear to be revolving at a hundred and eighty kilometres an hour around a planet

whose core is Max. Peggy recounts how Max grows jealous if she buys herself a dress, because he immediately wants to wear it. In Marseilles she had bought herself a suede jacket, upon which Max at once bought himself an identical one.

'The shop owner was surprised and insisted it was designed for a woman, but then he agreed to cut a new piece of suede to Max's measurements.'

It was impossible for her to take her eyes off Max, for his look was that of an eagle, and his nose like that of a silver beak.

'Do you know, Leonora,' Peggy says, 'Max gave me his books, and among them was one with a dedication to you that reads like this: "For Leonora, royal, beautiful and nude." I read *The Oval Lady* and *Pigeon Fly*. Utterly enchanting! I finished reading them in the train.'

If Leonora registers her words, she mentally erases them at once.

Peggy relates how she spent a whole night in the train with Max: 'How old he looks when he's asleep, don't you think so, darling?'

On seeing Leonora's expression, Peggy changes her tune and tells her how she still wants to rescue Victor Brauner, the artist who lost an eye. Brauner was refused a visa because the quota of Romanians admitted into the United States was already filled. Leonora looks at Max, who keeps quiet.

Max's visa to the United States has expired, and getting it renewed entails spending days waiting outside the US Embassy. 'Help! Help! Help!' Peggy waves her passport about her head and the officials clear a way for her. All powerful, she even manages to make fun of the police; not only is she an heiress, she is also the saviour of her present and future husbands. Djuna Barnes is still awaiting her passage in Paris.

Obtaining a visa is sheer hell, involving as it does assembling together a birth certificate, exit orders, *permis de séjour*, and some friends have nothing more to their names than an expired passport. Oh, the bureaucracy of it all! The friends eat seafood at the Leão d'Ouro to forget about it, where they run into Max and the English-woman, who hardly bothers even to greet Peggy.

A small fat blockage in her chest cavity obliges Leonora to be admitted to hospital for an operation.

Reclining on a white pillow, her black hair covers her shoulders and her alabaster arms give her a translucent aspect. The other patients, aware of her beauty, lean across to look at her. 'She is a painting.' 'Her mouth is so very red.' 'Her eyes are blazing.' Even Peggy is impressed. Those enormous dark eyes below Leonora's thick eyebrows observe her with suspicion. The perfection of her nose, fine and slender, is arresting. She is so beautiful that Peggy turns on her heels and returns to her place at the hotel bar.

‘Bring me a double whisky,’ she orders the barman. ‘On second thoughts, better to leave me the bottle.’

Max spends the whole day at Leonora’s side and only bids her farewell when the Mexican arrives. Marcel Duchamp, Herbert Read and Laurence Vail visit her in the clinic. They all agree that Leonora is an apparition. ‘Max won’t let go of her for a moment. He is crazy about her, only now do I realise how much he loves her. I never thought he was capable of loving with such intensity,’ Herbert Read observes.

‘Does it hurt?’ Max keeps asking her, every minute.

Leonora’s hand has faded and blends into the white sheets.

‘Might you have a fever? It seems to me that you look flushed.’

Leonora indicates No with her hands, then places them palms upwards, and Max kisses them. She remains impassive, she could so easily run her fingers through his white hair, she could so easily stroke his blue fish’s eyes; but she doesn’t. In Max’s face the suffering deepens. ‘That is how I suffered in the Villa Covadonga.’ She stays silent, since nothing now happening to her even comes close to anything that went on in the Villa Covadonga. She smoothes her sheet, and the sensation of well-being is new, rising from the tips of her toes to the crown of her head. How easy to sleep when you feel protected! There in the Villa Covadonga she would awaken on the edge of the abyss and with the smell of urine all around her; here the bed is white and clean as the host at Mass, or a handkerchief, or a cloud.

‘I am the Immaculate Conception, kiss my feet.’

Max kisses them.

Leonora is captivated by herself. ‘Everyone else loves me and so I love myself, utterly and madly.’

Max and she read and draw together in perfect harmony, with no need to speak to each other. The days run on over them like water. Kay Boyle swears that Max is a different man when he’s with Leonora. Whenever she is absent, he seems miserable and nervous and everything irritates him. ‘He’s crazy about her, ab-solu-te-ly crazy.’ Kay, finding herself in the same clinic due to sinusitis problems, visits her room every morning and the two grow closer.

‘What are you finally going to do?’ Kay asks. ‘Will you go back to Max?’

‘I don’t know … I don’t think I can do that to my husband.’

‘The Mexican?’

‘Yes. He has treated me very well.’

‘Max too.’

‘Max less so.’

‘See here, Leonora, you give the impression that you are waiting

for someone to hypnotise you, you're like a medium in a trance.'

'I don't know what to do.'

'Are you already married? Do you already have your marriage certificate?'

'Yes.'

'Do you really like him?'

'Yes, he is a good person.'

'That's not important. Do you like him as a man?'

'Yes.'

'Then stop carrying on as if you were waiting for a sign from on high, because what's going to hit you is a bolt of lightning.'

Kay persuades her to stay with the Mexican.

Max despises Renato. Sometimes, force of circumstances obliges them to keep each other's company, and Leonora always has a bad time of it. Renato is well aware of his rights, and she follows him upstairs. 'Goodnight, Max, sleep well.'

'If you live with Max,' Kay insists, 'he will end up using you. The sole form of cohabitation Max accepts is that of servitude.'

'You did me down!' Max blames Kay. 'I thought you were my friend and you betrayed me.'

'Of all people you have the least right to use the word betrayal,' Kay defends herself.

When Leonora is discharged from hospital, the group welcomes her back with open arms.

'I don't understand how such a beautiful woman can dress so badly,' Peggy comments. 'Surely looking a mess must be connected to her madness.'

'Peggy, don't be cruel,' Kay intervenes angrily. 'A month or two ago she was in an asylum, and right now she's only just come out of hospital.'

'Perhaps you could propose to her that she writes about her adventures while she was in there.'

'She surely will. It must have been a terrifying experience. The Mexican helped her out of it and still continues to look after her.'

'Then it's a good thing he does take charge of her, because Max abandoned his first wife, sent the second one to the devil, and doesn't even bother to look after his only son.'

'The Mexican gives her some stability …'

'And she's bound to need it. To me she looks as if she's having a rough time.'

Leonora explains to Max that she has to remain at Renato's side until they depart for New York.

'To my mind your being with him is an insult, and I would prefer not even to see you.'

Laurence Vail decides to go to the beach at Monte Estoril; the crowd follows after him.

On the first night there, Peggy comes across Max in the hotel lobby, and asks for Laurence's room number so she can go and wish him goodnight. Max gives her his own one instead. Peggy spends the night with him, and the couple resume their affair.

For the five weeks they spend on the coast, Leonora often comes over to spend the day with them. The riding club is magnificent; the horses excellent; and the ambience takes her back to her childhood. Children and adults ride all morning long. Leonora preens. If she could, she would whinny. The horse synchronises with her: she is a woman with a horse's body, or a mare with a woman's face. Her body is wreathed in waves of energy, the force of their furious gallop attracts attention. Children pause as if magnetised, their eyes fixed on the track. She is dazzling, her body lengthens, she jumps every gate, the hooves of her mount echo — they resound like bells, horseshoes bringing good luck. Nothing makes her happier than this equine flight which Max follows with his eyes like a bird of prey.

'What are you doing with that inferior man?' Max asks, seated astride his horse.

'What do you mean?' Leonora pulls up abruptly.

'You know very well.'

Leonora spurs on her horse.

'He is not an inferior man and I owe him my life.'

On another occasion at the livery yard, Max again rails against the Mexican.

'Don't you dare speak ill of him, I refuse to let you,' and Leonora's eyes cloud over. 'I was devastated when I lost you, but that time in the asylum opened my eyes.'

'That kind of experience is bound to change your life, I know, but from now on we're going to live together, and paint together.'

'And Peggy?'

'I am not in love with Peggy.'

'If you don't love her you should not be with her.'

'Peggy was my only way out. Do you love your Mexican?'

Desperate at the thought of losing her, Ernst overwhelms her: 'Peggy knows that you are the only woman I love.'

'That means you're using her?'

'And you are using your Mexican?'

'My situation is different.'

'No it is not. Peggy may get me out of Europe, but once in New York things will change completely.'

'The war is driving us all mad. I owe my survival to someone else, and I am as yet unsure of what you and I can mean to each other.'

Leonora turns on her heel.

One Sunday she turns up in Estoril with Renato. He, too, is an excellent horseman, and he entertains them all with his tales of Pancho Villa, the one and only true Mexican, the Centaur of the North, the general who dynamited the train lines together with their wagons and everything on them; and who carried off women over his shoulder — all before going so far as to invade the United States. Leonora smiles and Max, furious, attempts to unseat her, while Peggy celebrates the Mexican Revolution: 'Yes indeed, those are real men!'

The group observes that Leduc could equally well command a battalion, lay siege to a fortress, or cross the deserts of Antar at a gallop.

In the morning, Leonora opens her bedroom door. Her wet hair hangs loose over her shoulders.

'I want to speak with you,' Peggy tells her. 'It's time to come clean about our situation. Let's go and have a drink.'

Seated opposite one other, the two women square up. Leonora opens her eyes so wide they flash daggers, while Peggy just turns up her nose at her.

'Either you get back together with Max, or else you should leave him to me.'

'He is all yours.'

'Are you going to stay with the Mexican?'

'That's my business.'

'What are you going to do?'

'For now, I won't be returning to Estoril, although I shall certainly miss the horses here.'

Leonora rises from the table and leaves Peggy with words still on the tip of her tongue.

When Peggy tells Max, he is so angry that he obliges Peggy to write to Leonora to beg her to resume her visits to Estoril.

Leonora never returns.

'No doubt the Mexican keeps her better entertained,' Kay says, insinuatingly.

31. MADAME GUGGENHEIM

'WAR CHANGES THINGS, Max!'

'Don't I know it? They banged me up in three concentration camps, one after the other. If anyone knows about those changes, it has to be me.'

'And what about me?' Leonora muses to herself. 'Why does he never ask me about the time I spent locked up in the asylum? Why was the only thing he asked me when we were reunited how I could have lost the house and his canvases? Why does he only talk about himself and never listen to me? Even back in St. Martin d'Ardèche, the whole world revolved around him. When I painted him in his cape of feathers, as the superior bird, I felt the same shiver up my spine as I do now; when I thought he might end it with me.'

One night, Peggy hears a knocking on the door of her hotel room. She opens it to find Leonora and Max standing there.

'Here you are, I am returning him to you,' says the Englishwoman.

There can be no doubt that, in spite of everything, Leonora has much more in common with the group that revolves in Peggy Guggenheim's orbit than with Renato Leduc. They speak the same language, walk the same streets, move in the same circles, read the same books, frequent Piccadilly and St. Giles, Hyde Park Corner and the Tate Gallery, attend Ascot. And they are all insatiable. They create the atmosphere of a gala performance, thanks to their ingenuity in criticising absent friends. Peggy Guggenheim praises Lucian Freud, and Herbert Read applies the brakes to her impulses to keep constantly buying up pictures.

In the course of her multiple acquisitions the millionairess has succeeded in acquiring a good eye. Of course she always has Herbert Read in tow to consult; yet on many occasions she makes a selection on her own, and hits the nail on the head. Kay Boyle complains that the war prevents her from writing, and gossips to Leonora that Sam Beckett was one of Peggy's lovers, too.

'I don't know who Beckett is, but the worst part of this all is that I still haven't read this Djuna Barnes of whom you all talk so much,' Leonora apologises.

'But you do know who Read is: he acts as a consultant to Peggy in all her purchases.'

'Yes I know that much. He and I went for a walk along the esplanade the other day.'

Peggy offers Leonora a ticket to fly to New York with the rest of

her retinue.

'Thank you, but no. I shall travel by boat with Renato Leduc.'

'So will you be leaving ahead of the rest of us?' Max interrupts.

'Yes, we'll be departing on the *Exeter*.'

'Do you think you could take some more of my rolled canvases, which I can't manage to bring on the liner with me?' Max asks, pale with anxiety.

'Yes, I can.'

'They make for quite a fat bundle. In it, along with the *Loplop* you painted, there is also my *Leonora in the Morning Light*.'

Max oversees the packaging, ensuring that every care is taken in rolling up the canvases, which results in their being both heavy and awkward to carry.

That night in the hotel, Leonora says to Renato: 'Max does not love Peggy, yet he is with her.'

'And you, who after all married me, do you actually love me?'

'Not yet, although I may yet come to,' Leonora admits. 'What do you make of Peggy, Renato?'

'She's a Yank who knows how to throw her money around.'

'And Max?'

'I would rather not discuss that son of a bitch.'

'What do you mean son of a bitch?'

'You'll understand later, when we get to Mexico. In my opinion, Max is a bastard.'

Leonora keeps quiet and repeats as if she were reciting the rosary: 'I married Renato, I am travelling from here with Renato, I am *with* Renato. If I owe anything to anyone, it's to Renato.'

At Crookhey Hall, everything was always kept under lock and key. Now she, too, guards her secret — the decision to follow Renato — deep in her heart.

At the Mexican Consulate, endless applications for departure visas are overwhelming Leduc, and he returns home in a state of daily exhaustion.

'It's so dramatic, it looks like another Great Flood, everyone is huddling for refuge under the wing of Mexico.'

'Don't forget to get at least one last pair of lizards onto the ark, although in your country they may well turn into crocodiles.'

Sitting in their deckchairs on the top deck of the *Exeter*, beside Renato who keeps her snug under a rug, makes her feel more at ease. The sailors all turn to stare as Leonora's hair blows in the wind. Leonora pays scant attention to the noise of the ship's machinery, or to the shortage of food.

'Renato, there where the sea meets the horizon, I can see a castle.'

'It's a mirage.'

‘Christ comes walking across the waters.’

‘I thought you weren’t a believer?’

‘I think he must be drunk, because he’s walking in zigzags.’

The dawn, the dusk, the salty air and the gulls in flight give her a sense of well-being she hasn’t experienced for years.

32. NEW YORK

LEONORA AND RENATO LIVE on 306 West 73rd Street, in downtown Manhattan. Every morning, Leduc goes to work at the Mexican Embassy and Leonora, lingering with a degree of trepidation, only emerges on to the street with her mac around her shoulders and a cigarette between her lips after having downed several cups of tea. She walks and walks, nothing pleases her more than walking. What a way to defy the skies over New York! Not only does the city grow upwards, but it has its roots in the seabed, and the skyscrapers cling to the ground so they won't take flight. Crowds levitate in the streets, their arms becoming wings which raise them ever higher. To walk through Central Park is to cross the garden of Eden. People hurry about, their skin looks taut, their hair and eyes shine brightly. Men, women and children cheerfully greet one another: 'Hi!'; 'Hi there!'; 'Hello!'. New Yorkers are a breath of fresh air, for all their toothpaste smiles! Leonora tries out the city as if it were a new frock, and the ground creaks beneath her clicking heels. 'No Spain, no, no more Spain, I shall never return to Spain; I am here to inaugurate a new Leonora.'

Renato's way of seeing the world puts her in a good mood. He always has a joke on the tip of his tongue: 'Ay, Leonora, don't complicate things, each day offers us something new, here and now, don't be a misery guts!'

Standing on the subway platform waiting for the train, between a black guy as tall as the Statue of Liberty and a Puerto Rican woman with enormous earrings, Leonora spies her old friend from the days of the Ozenfant Academy, Stella Snead: 'Incredible! So it's true the world is no bigger than a thimble!' Stella informs her that Amédée Ozenfant, also now in New York, is still teaching. 'Let's stop by and say hello.' When he receives them, he no longer treats them like pupils. 'We have to celebrate!' They are now his equals. He invites them to tea at Tiffany's. That evening, when Leonora tells Renato all about her day, she tells him that she also saw Max.

'What a coincidence, another meeting with the neurotic ape!'

'I saw him in the Pierre Matisse Gallery. He and Peggy are inviting us to dinner on Saturday. I shall take the opportunity to return his canvases to him. He told me how, when he came down the steps from the aeroplane, at the very moment when Jimmy approached to give him a hug, two officers seized him and he was locked up on Ellis Island. His photo appeared in the press with his face the picture of panic. They held him in solitary confinement, incommunicado in his cell. Jimmy moved heaven and earth and,

thanks mainly to him, the director of the Museum of Modern Art, and Peggy's money, Max was set free.

'Well this young lad must be a mess, having a pimp for a Pa.'

'What do you mean by a pimp?'

'A man who lives off women, like your Max.'

Peggy owns a house on Sutton Place, close by the Hudson, in the district where all the embassies are. Whenever she sees Leonora, she greets her with a face as long as a lobster's. Renato, though, she welcomes with open arms. That evening they are to join Peggy, Kurt Seligmann, Jimmy Ernst — who appeals to Renato considerably more than his father — Berenice Abbott, Amédée Ozenfant, André Breton, Fernand Léger, Marcel Duchamp and Piet Mondrian.

'Man Ray takes himself too seriously; Marcel Duchamp is much easier to deal with,' Leonora says to Renato.

'Marcel Duchamp is a leech who passes the time playing chess, and Max is the most neurotic man I've ever met. Maybe one day you'll distance yourself a little from these Surrealists?' Renato says accusingly.

'They are my people,' Leonora says.

The one appealing character is definitely Luis Buñuel, whom Renato always tries to sit next to. He is direct and always questions him about Mexico, his prominent eyes looking at him with a genuinely interested air of enquiry.

'Are there dwarves in your country?'

'We certainly have plenty of vertically challenged politicians.'

That night Leonora dreams that she and Peggy are lobsters attacking each other while everyone else stands by just looking.

From that moment on Leonora, Max, Peggy Guggenheim, André Breton and Jacqueline Lamba, Marcel Duchamp, Luis Buñuel and the elderly Amédée Ozenfant meet up regularly. They follow Peggy from one party to the next, gathering prospective clients as they go. One of Peggy's favourite expressions is 'Let's throw a party.' Her energy is as inexhaustible as her appetite for shopping. She promotes, divulges, weighs up, pronounces on the originality of the avant-garde; she glides from one group to the next, glass in hand, with the slender haughtiness of a fashion model. She always seems to have some excitable pet on her lap. She invites newcomers to dinner, makes flirtatious remarks, all her energy is consumed in doing business and, thanks to her, the Surrealists sell their pictures.

In return, they render shameless homage to the millionaires, tout for trade like street vendors, or else declare themselves to be on the verge of suicide. It all serves to aggrandise their sense of self-importance, and Peggy is crowned the queen of public relations. The press promotes her scandals and she sells them to the highest bidder.

‘We are on top of the world,’ Man Ray exclaims.

Peggy is busy filling up her diary. ‘Lunch with Herbert Read,’ she notes; ‘tea with Elsa Maxwell’, ‘interview with the editors of the *New York Times, Vogue, Harper’s Bazaar*’.

Behind every lifeless picture, there is an artist fighting to position their own work in the best place on the wall, while money simmers and bubbles away. Each and every step Guggenheim takes around her gigantic drawing room means dollars: when she extends her hand to be kissed, dollars drip from her fingers; each phone call clinches a deal. Of course, she herself will be left with the vast canvas that Leonora painted of Max in St. Martin d’Ardèche (*Loplop, the Superior Bird*) which he both saved and then surrendered to her.

‘Send the lot of them to the devil, and I’ll support you in Mexico,’ Renato offers.

‘No, I still can’t. They are my friends and my family.’

‘I think I’m worth more than all of them put together.’

Leonora stays silent.

Without intending to, Dalí had opened a pathway for them in New York. In 1939, the company Bonwit & Teller invited him to decorate the front window of their main department store and the Catalan chose the theme of night and day. *Day* was a mannequin on the point of stepping into a fur-lined bath tub, similar to the hairy cup devised by Meret Oppenheim; *Night* was a brazier glowing with embers, with a black backdrop and curtains. Without consultation, the store owners altered a part of the scenario they decided looked obscene; Dalí waited for the busiest moment of the day, and then launched himself, furry bath and all, on to the spectators in the street outside. The court ordered him to pay the costs of the shattered window, plus a fine to stay out of prison. His patron Edward James made haste to defray the expenses: ‘It couldn’t matter less. The whole of New York is dying for a Dalí,’ asserted James. But by now the curious were avid for a new spectacle.

Max Ernst pursues Leonora relentlessly: ‘You are my woman, the one that I love; the lover of the wind. Loplop and she cannot be separated.’

He turns up at the house every morning, an hour after Renato leaves for the Embassy and tells her: ‘Let’s go!’

Leonora throws her mac over her shoulders and follows him out. The difference between Renato and Max is that Max is her world and her mentor, he shows her the buildings she has to see, the books she must read, he extends the vision of a brilliant future shining before her, of winning the Grand Prix at the Venice Biennale and at Rome.

If he doesn’t turn up Leonora grows anxious, calls him on the phone, begs him to take her to lunch. Complicity is like handcuffs and

only Max holds the key. They walk the banks of the Hudson, where heavy barges navigate their way beneath the watchful eyes of Bell Chevigny, looking down from her window on Riverside Drive.

'Walking is good for us and we can pretend the Hudson is the Seine.'

They walk enthusiastically from ten in the morning until eight at night, pausing a while in Washington Square, visiting Manhattan, discovering the Lower East Side. They walk as far as Brooklyn, a place that Max never gets to visit with Peggy. Guggenheim is the provider and Leonora the inspiration. Peggy organises one show after another so she can forget that Max only turns up at home when he feels like it, and even then only has eyes for Leonora. Leonora is the one he introduces to his friends; Leonora the one to whom he gives his arm; Leonora the one he never lets out of his sight. He has but one obsession: Leonora, Leonora, Leonora; and Peggy is left to suffer. Waiting for Max has become an agony.

Peggy begins to protest: 'Everyone says you spend all your time with her. If you are here in New York, it's thanks to me, not to her.'

Jimmy Ernst is increasingly worried by the strange mixture of desolation and euphoria visible in the drawn features of his father. It is there in his fixed look and in the lines of his thin, bitter lips.

'The only thing that matters to you is meeting up with that Englishwoman again.'

Jimmy himself does not exist for Max.

Max sits beside the telephone awaiting a call from Leonora. If it doesn't come, he falls into the deepest depression.

'Not today, Max.' When Leonora refuses him, she is unaware that she is pushing him further towards the abyss.

The weekends are spent with Renato who takes her off to Coney Island. 'Let's climb onto the first roller coaster in all the United States,' and Leonora allows herself to be taken. As she becomes more used to being with Renato, his frequent absences cause her all the more anguish.

On days like these the desperation in Max's eyes is such that they cannot settle on anything, and he bursts into irrational laughter with an offensive ring to it. Max could not give a fig for what anyone else does; only for what Leonora is up to.

'Last night, six geese marched across Fifth Avenue,' Leonora informs Max, 'they were heading for Sutton Place, to be stuffed for dinner at your house, but all of a sudden a hyena appeared and ate them up … and snaffled up the rest of dinner, too.'

Once in a while Leonora protests and Max does not know how to reply. Her sense of irony renders her impenetrable. Max longs only to sweep her up in his arms, but she won't let him. Ever since she left St.

Martin d'Ardèche she has not been the same, and the hostility between the two of them is intensified.

'What about Peggy?' Leonora enquires.

'She's the boss,' comes the answer.

33. WHITE RABBITS

LEONORA REVOLVES BENEATH THE SKYSCRAPERS, in ecstasy over this new life which makes her seasick with its speed and the force of its energy. How is it possible to be so happy after being so utterly miserable? Leonora wakes up every morning feeling light as a feather, and the Surrealists comment on her sense of humour and acts of libertarianism. After an experience like hers in Villa Covadonga, such a change is unprecedented. The Englishwoman is grateful for it. 'The Morales doctors could never have imagined my becoming the comet on whose tail everyone seeks to hitch a ride.' Sometimes, in the midst of the whirlwind, she has the distinct sensation of a dagger being planted between her shoulder blades. 'It's really my wings on the point of breaking out,' she thinks, 'the wings I need in order to fly away from Max.'

Darling, glad to meet you, have a good day, enjoy: such formulas spur her on to flight.

'Tomorrow I wish to be alone, Max.'

'Tomorrow I can't see you, Max.'

'Tomorrow, I need to write, Max.'

'Tomorrow, I have an appointment I can't miss, Max.'

Max soon doesn't get to see her the days she needs to wash her hair, either. Leonora warns him well ahead of the ceremony: 'On Thursday I have to wash my hair, Max.' After rinsing it out, she sits beside the window to dry her hair in the sun, pulling back the jet black curtain which falls across her face, so she can see the buildings dark and dusty with soot, as dark as her black hair.

She knows Max loves her, but often finds being apart from him restful.

Through her window she can see a crow swooping down to perch on the balcony rail of the building opposite. The crow scratches himself, searches out something beneath his wing, while a woman comes out on to the balcony and lays a dish on the floor, which the bird acknowledges with a squawk. The woman watches Leonora from her balcony, smiles at her, and then asks if she doesn't have a morsel of leftover meat to give to the crow.

Leonora buys some meat and waits until it starts to rot before she crosses the street. The woman, her white face spangled with a thousand tiny stars, opens the door to her.

'Come on up.'

Inside, a hundred white rabbits with pink eyes are awaiting the scraps of putrid meat. They share it among themselves. Then her hostess points out a man whose skin shines like her own, sitting in an

armchair in the corner of the room.

'Let me introduce Lázaro to you.'

On his lap Lázaro has a large white rabbit, busily engaged in tearing a piece of meat to shreds. The woman puts her cheek close to Leonora's and the stench of putrefaction in her breath shocks her.

'If you are coming here to live with us, young lady, your skin will become covered with the stars of the holy disease as recorded in the Bible: its name is leprosy.'

As she flees, Leonora looks back to see the lady of the balcony raising her hand in salutation, as two fingers fall to the floor.

Leonora writes *White Rabbits* and relives her dream as a premonition. If she remains in New York, she will catch leprosy. Peggy Guggenheim infects all the little rabbits who circle in her orbit.

Leonora's behaviour in New York continues to be eccentric. The retinue gathers at the French restaurant Larre, on 56th Street, or goes round to Breton's apartment in Greenwich Village. There they all talk enthusiastically of the new magazine *VVV*. Breton continues to issue orders and Jacqueline is clearly fed up. As she explains 'he is so domineering', and Leonora agrees with her. Sometimes the group congratulates Leonora on her eccentricities, and sometimes it condemns them. Luis Buñuel is surprised when, in the midst of a dinner at Barbara Reiss' house, Leonora leaves the dinner table, goes into the bathroom and returns soaking wet, with her dress clinging to her body. She comes back to the dining room streaming with water, sits down opposite Buñuel and stares at him fixedly:

'I just took a shower.'

'With your clothes on?'

'Yes.'

'Then I shall take you back home.'

'You are a very attractive man,' she tells Buñuel, clutching his arm. 'You remind me of my prison warder, Luis Morales.'

There's no doubt about it, Buñuel is a good man. Leonora was not there for the screening of *L'Age d'Or* in Paris, the night on which the League of Patriots and the Anti-Jewish League threw paint at the screen, and slashed four Surrealist canvases hanging in the cinema lobby. This time, Buñuel takes her arm instead, and his prominent eyes sweep over her. When she looks back at him with anguish, he tells her: 'I am the one of us here who has been excommunicated,' and his smile pacifies her. 'Being a man condemned sets you above the multitude. They expelled Charles de Noailles from the Jockey Club, and it was all the fault of my film, which he directed. That day we opened a bottle of champagne. Would you like us to go and have a glass somewhere now?'

Her gastronomic experiments also cause a sensation. She invites

André Breton and Marcel Duchamp round to eat and serves them a rabbit stuffed with oysters.

Nobody wants anything more to do with Dalí. 'He's a whore.' 'He's gone too far now.' Not even Max continues to meet up with Gala, his ex-lover, except that now he refers to her by her given name: Elena Ivanovna Diakonova. Being extravagant is a means to acquire celebrity and Surrealists are not interested in glory.

There are days on which Leonora reverts to Villa Covadonga, back to her former state of depression. On others, her rage makes her laugh. In one restaurant she smears her feet in mustard:

'That'll make that pompous waiter put us out on to the street.'

Buñuel tells her of an experiment conducted by some North American scientists, about a couple shut up in a cage, who would not be fed for the duration of the test. In love, they agreed to being guinea pigs. As their hunger increased, the lover forgot about his love, and they had to remove the love birds before they killed one another.

'Did he leave any bones?'

'Ay, Leonora!'

'I understood that he had devoured her.'

'No, it didn't happen quite like that.'

'Do you think that Max would have sacrificed himself for me?'

Buñuel chose to tell her the story of the book he liked best. Two good friends who had lost touch with each other decided to meet up again. One, crazy with joy, took the train to the country house of the other, who was awaiting him anxiously. Gradually, they became aware that they actually had nothing at all to say to each other.

'Are you telling me this because of Max?'

'No, Leonora, and please stop bringing everything back to your own situation.'

'Do you really think that Max and I have nothing to say to each other?'

'Leonora, please don't start.'

To Renato, his wife's behaviour does not provide cause for concern. The fact is he spends so little time with her that he isn't really keeping up. Leonora feels safe when she's with him and, in order to please her, Renato sometimes accompanies her to her various dinners; but when he refuses to go out, Leonora doesn't put in an appearance either, much to Max's annoyance.

Breton and Tanguy are assiduous regulars at the gatherings and they worry about her. 'Leonora please don't leave off writing.' 'Don't stop painting now, Leonora.' Deep inside her, the asylum is alive and flourishing, and surfaces in the subjects she paints. In *Green Tea,* a Leonora swathed like a mummy in the wake of a session of electro-convulsive therapy pauses in the middle of the garden at Santander, at

the centre of a circle from which there is no exit. To one side, a female hyena with a tail like a tree has a horse tethered to the trunk, with another tree for its tail, tied in its turn to the female hyena.

In Stanley William Hayter's studio, Leonora creates her first black-and-white print on a glass plate, which allows her to relive the madness; she draws with such realistic precision that it looks as if she is copying the scene imprinted on her brain by her life itself: chained dogs facing inwards to the centre of a circle likewise endowed with a hound's paws and face. Leonora is the same chained dog that appears in *Green Tea*.

'Look here, Leonora,' David Hare, Breton and Duchamp all tell her, 'your sketch will be included in an original portfolio of works from *VVV* that we are about to launch.'

Other collaborators include Marc Chagall, Alexander Calder (the inventor of the kinetic mobile), André Masson (for whom Nietzsche is God), the macabre Kurt Seligmann, Yves Tanguy, André Breton, Roberto Matta and Robert Motherwell.

Leonora cannot contain her surprise when Manka Rubinstein, sister to the cosmetics entrepreneur Helena, commissions a painting the size of a wall in her house.

'I don't even have enough money to buy a canvas as big as that,' she admits to Max.

'Don't worry about it, we'll go and see Chagall. He is the only artist now selling like hot cakes. Tell him you'll pay him back as soon as you get the money from Helena Rubinstein,' Duchamp proposes.

Chagall scrutinises the eight little sketches the Englishwoman presents him with and lets fall, in the strongest of Russian accents: 'Carry on painting, little one, carry on painting,' but he doesn't loan her a single canvas, still less any money. Breton had the idea of taking the sheet off his bed and placing it in Leonora's arms.

'Here you are, and now to work. Why waste time over someone so stingy?'

Duchamp, Matta and Ernst are her assistants. The Chilean Roberto Matta is enthusiastic and, as an architect, he knows all about proportions and perspectives. His technique is to use sexual perversion as a means to understanding his subjects. Duchamp, for whom Leonora has considerable sympathy, in not taking himself seriously, fills in the background. Max signs with his little blue bird in the upper left-hand corner of the canvas.

'Why are you signing it if the painting is Leonora's?' Duchamp enquires.

'I only put in my blue bird for good luck,' Max disingenuously pretends.

When they finish the mural, Manka Rubinstein is charmed, and

hands over $200, far more than Leonora has ever previously earned for a painting.

'Can you imagine what Helena Rubinstein must have paid for Dalí to decorate her apartment?'

One night, after a massive celebration of the success with Rubinstein together with Max, Duchamp and Matta, Leonora finally returns home to discover that Renato is not there. His absence gives rise to a severe panic attack. She seizes Leduc's portable Olivetti typewriter and begins to write furiously:

'Did you go out again after returning home and not finding me here? Have I come back too late? I was so sure that you would be in and now that you're not I find an immense sadness deep inside me. When I came in the porter gave me a look as if you had told him something about me. Is that true?

'I am slowly and painfully exploding with the desire to see you, please come back soon. I cannot stretch out on the bed alone, on that devourer of fornicators, only with you there beside me; I don't dare to lie down alone upon such an object. I am terrified to be here alone, of falling into the chasm. I love you abominably, it's horrific to be here alone without you, even though I am used to your being away all day long. I loathe New York. I love you and I want to make love to you, to kiss you and lick you. It is getting late and there's no sign of you. I'm not afraid of anything, for the love of God — or of Satan, better of Satan — come soon, come soon, Renato. I am going mad without you, I need you so much. I am in anguish, and I need you so much. If only you knew how much I need you! I am not going to stop writing until you get back, and that way your absence will feel less terrible. Have you ever felt such strength of emotion? It's horrible. Tomorrow I'll go to the Consulate with you, just in order not to be without you. This lost night, night of loss, is truly terrible. I realise I am now becoming hysterical. Do you blame me and is that why you don't come home? I don't believe you capable of behaving like this. Luckily, you are not like me. I would be willing to give up the cat, all my hair and my left hand to have you back. I am going to strip myself of every violent emotion in order not to be in a bad mood when you return. It is terrible of me to get annoyed with you. I love you. From time to time I stop writing to see if I can hear your steps on the stairs. If you don't come soon, I shall have to write a new page, and then another and another, throughout the night. Nothing can be worse than these feelings that suffocate me. The cat suffers along with me when we are alone, they should give him a dose of Cardiazol too, and put him in a seaside asylum.

'(See I have had to start a fresh page). Now I really am afraid. What can you be doing? Where are you? Are you happy to be without

me at this moment in time? RENATO, FOR THE LOVE OF THE DEVIL, COME SOON.

'I don't know if I should go out and look for you. In any case, I've no idea where to go to look for you … That frightens me. I realise how close I am again to madness: I am sweating and trembling over something that would seem unimportant to most people.

'Should I go out or not? It's hard to know. I think I may be starting to write nonsense. RENATO, RENATO, RENATO, you have to hear me, I am shouting so loud from deep inside. Can't you hear me?

'If my love for you has turned to drivel, you should learn that one should never fall in love with madwomen, for we are all the same.

'RENATO.

'RENATO.

'RENATO.

'I can hear a sound on the staircase but it's not you.

'NO.

'I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you. What I've been through, when you get back you won't have any idea of what tempests of fear and sadness I've been through. You will be calm as ever.

'I am tortured, I am dying, I am furious and I know I exaggerate. R E N A T O, if you don't come before I write four more lines, I shall go out and get drunk. Sadly, totally, and in dignified solitude. My handwriting is truly awful. Come quickly as I am about to go out. I am terrified to be without you. Maybe you are tired of me. Renato, after you have read this letter, I want you to tell me over and over that you love me in order to reassure me, and that you'll kiss me at least a hundred times over and with great tenderness, for it is vile being the hysteric I am. You must not leave me alone, *damn blast bugger and hellFIRE*.

'RENATO, I AM UTTERLY TERRIFIED OF BEING WITHOUT YOU.

'I am coming downstairs, I love you.'

34. CHECKMATE THE KING

PEGGY GUGGENHEIM REFUSES to allow her feelings to get in the way of her admiration for Leonora's paintings, and she includes *The Horses of Lord Candlestick* in the exhibition she uses to launch the new gallery in Manhattan she calls *Art of this Century*.

Thirty-one Surrealist women are included, putting their own revolution on show.

Peggy nervously walks through the exhibition halls. Max has installed himself beside the phone, awaiting Leonora's call since dawn. Djuna Barnes confirms the general observation:

'The only occasion on which I've seen Max show any emotion is when he's around Leonora. Otherwise, to me he always appears as cold as a reptile.'

In their reunions, Leonora always manages to sit next to Breton. In acknowledging her power, Breton admires the originality of the painter who proves herself capable of coming back from the abyss.

'After seeing your drawings, I think it's important that you also write about your madness. When I was a doctor, the French psychiatrist Pierre Janet talked to me about *l'amour fou*, a study of hysteria in women. He was responsible for discovering both the eroticism and the aesthetics that I converted into Surrealism.'

'I can't, André, I can't for it still hurts me too much.'

'It's just that if you did, you might be able to save many others. For more than fifteen years, I've protested against locking up the mentally infirm. That's what the first Surrealist Manifesto is all about. I could have devoted my life to collecting the secrets of the demented and to defending them against the law that judges them for actions that to me are no more than bids for freedom.'

'What constitutes a bid for freedom, in your opinion?'

'Challenging whoever confronts you; saying what you think; taking off your clothes whenever it appeals to you; reaching the apex of convulsion through pain or joy …'

So why is Breton himself not possessed of this convulsive beauty, why does it always have to be a woman? Breton does not offer himself as a candidate to wake up in bed of a morning, naked and smeared with his own faeces. What he would prefer is for the woman to return to the abyss, so he can analyse her and so complete his views on the unconscious.

'There is an abyss between your theoretical concepts and the agony I went through thanks to the Cardiazol.'

'In spite of your agony, you need to make an effort.'

'However much of a doctor you are, you talk like a spectator.'

‘I visited numerous French asylums with Pierre Janet, and followed experiments in using hypnosis in the treatment of hysteria.’

‘But for you it was never a lived inner experience; and there’s the difference.’

‘I am a doctor and I love women. I am advising you to write about what you have lived. Your stories are truly excellent; keep writing, Leonora. Or are you regretting something from your past life?’

‘No, I don’t regret a thing.’

Leonora takes great pains in elaborating a version of her experiences in Santander.

‘Show it to me,’ Breton insists.

Jacqueline Lamba and Breton no longer love one another as before, and this has repercussions on Aube. Jacqueline complains that Breton never introduces her as a painter, but rather as a Naiad he has fished out of the Seine. In revenge, Lamba cultivates David Hare, a millionaire admirer, who follows her around everywhere, insisting that she is a genius, and that every one of her brushstrokes is a revelation.

Breton includes Leonora in the Surrealist exhibition held in the Reid mansion, for the benefit of both prisoners of war and French children.

‘It’s a phenomenal event. New York will fall flat on its face before us.’

In order to decorate the ugly interior of the Reid mansion, the painters have recourse to Duchamp, who is unable to tear himself away from his chessboard.

‘Marcel, you’ve lost touch with reality!’ comments his inseparable companion Man Ray. ‘Your life consists in sixty-four black-and-white squares.’

Chess is satanic. Duchamp spends weeks on end locked away, searching for new strategies. The thirty-two wooden figures are his father, his mother, his siblings, his friends and his lovers. Man Ray interrupts him and Duchamp grows annoyed, chases him away:

‘Leave me in peace, I am studying the relative advantages of the moves available to me, and the possibilities for castling!’

‘How can you possibly reduce your life to a few pieces of wood, when everyone is waiting outside for you?’

Finally, once Duchamp has completely run out of food, Peggy Guggenheim furnishes him with an advance to decorate the Reid mansion. Anxious to get back to his chessboard, Duchamp works like a slave, races like a horse, and in two days hangs up a gigantic spider’s web that reaches from one room to the next. David Hare’s wife, Susanna, helps him to unwind thousands of metres of string in order

to weave a web covering the whole ceiling. At first it bemuses the assistants, until Duchamp's immense creation flies high over their heads and sweeps them up in its movement, just like that of the nude descending a staircase.

'Your cobweb is the work of a master!' exclaims Herbert Read.

Leonora exhibits two paintings, and goes round to Duchamp's house to tell him that the ceiling in the Reid mansion is a dream:

'Do you know how to play chess?' he asks her, before saying hello.

'No, teach me.'

'I have been playing for seven years.'

Duchamp, with the board on his table, explains that the pawns always advance in a straight line, two squares in the first move, then take pieces by moving diagonally to either right or left; that the knight moves in the line of an L, the castle in a straight line, and the bishop only diagonally, according to the colours on the board; the queen moves where she wishes and does what she likes, the same as every woman, and the king likes the high life: 'As I wanted to be until Lydie checkmated me.'

'You have a beginner's luck.'

'Just like in poker?'

In April, an issue of *View* magazine is dedicated to thirty pictures by Max Ernst, including a reproduction of *Loplop, the Superior Bird.*

'This is our farewell, the end of the bird and the mare,' Leonora warns him.

'Max and Surrealism have changed your life irrevocably. To go to Mexico would be a mistake. We are going to miss you too much. Max is the superior bird. How will your story continue without him?' Breton enquires.

'It might be that this is when it all begins.'

She is worn out by the conflict with Peggy. Their friends discuss Max's obsession with her, and the circulation of dollars that keeps Surrealism revolving around Guggenheim.

'You are so crazy for Leonora, there's no way you can conceal it.'

'No, Peggy, you are my partner, Leonora was my disciple. What interests me in her is her talent.'

Max insists that the woman he lives and sleeps with is still Peggy.

The magazine *VVV* publishes Leonora's short story 'Waiting'; *View* publishes 'White Rabbits'. New York renders homage to Leonora. Renato itches to return to Mexico and Max grows increasingly edgy.

'I hope you have finally realised that your place is here. I can find other outlets that will publish you, get you a solo exhibition.'

'I am going to leave with Leduc.'

'Impossible! You will lose everything, it'll be the end of your

career, Mexico doesn't feature in the art market, there are no galleries there, you're off to bury yourself in a country that practises human sacrifice. The muralists are nothing but political propagandists. Nobody will be able to understand you, a true libertarian. How is it possible that you could want to leave just when you are beginning to become known here?' Max is growing desperate.

'This conversation is in bad taste and I refuse to waste my energy on it.'

Max is her maestro but deep inside herself, something — or someone — keeps repeating: 'If you stay here you'll be committing an act of cowardice, you will become paralysed in Max's and in Peggy's shadows, until one of the two of you gives up.'

'You have turned to stone, Leonora.'

'Suffering causes petrification.'

'You only think of yourself.'

'And you, who are you thinking of, Max?'

What would happen were she to find she *was* made of stone?

If she doesn't flee as far as possible, she will once again become trapped by the rules, even if this time it's those laid down by the Surrealists. Mexico is her escape route, the way out of a burning house.

After the war and her time in the asylum, she has come to know the extremes of irrationality and cruelty, the furthest possible point of man's brutality.

'Max, I still don't know what the meaning is of my life, but I do know I want to paint and that I can only do this if I live according to my own rules; I need to explore something I began to discern while I was in the asylum, something that goes beyond normal experience, and that I can't properly explain to you.'

'It's absurd for you to go.'

'Well, I want to go beyond the absurd, drop down on the far side of logic, to find what the absurd has to offer, if indeed it can give me anything at all.'

Some of their number start to return to France. Breton doesn't even make the effort to learn English; he leaves his wife, Jacqueline Lamba, to David Hare. Max stays glued to Peggy's side; she, Leonora, is obliged to take a greater risk: that is the lesson she learnt from her stay in Santander. Surely not even Imperial Chemical would pursue her all the way to Mexico. Far from her father's clutches and from Max, she could choose her own way of life, while remaining loyal to her vocation. Loyal, too, to the suffering of which no-one else had the least idea, and which one day — if only at the age of ninety-nine — she would forget.

'I want to keep my soul alive and if I don't succeed I'll be lost. I

have something very special inside myself, an essence that could either dissolve, or maybe burn until it turns to smoke, or else freeze me searing like ice — because extremes always meet and ice scorches just as much as fire. But if I stay here, in New York, Max, I shall never be more than your projection.'

Renato keeps insisting on how beautiful Mexico is: 'It is a virgin country, Leonora, where whole regions remain to be discovered. Europe is a stew pot, *un pot au feu*, in which everything has already been cooked. Now, in New York, people are taking an interest in the Surrealists, but tomorrow, who knows? The Yanks change their tastes overnight. But Mexico is free of both snobbery and sophistication, we are still hungry in every sense of the word. New York is a total rat race, you have to come out ahead by whatever means you can. In my home country, the game has hardly begun; we remain more ingenuous and naive; and for the same reason, more brutal.'

'And why would I want cruelty?'

To Leonora it seems that her time in the asylum rubbed her face in the earth until it bled. She suffered so much for Max in St. Martin d'Ardèche, and it went on until she reached Santander. Max wasn't bothered by the fact that he was using Peggy, since he felt he deserved whatever came his way. All of a sudden, the cries of Marie-Berthe Aurenche echo back to her from the Rue Jacob; she recalls the fate of Louise Straus, arrested by the Nazis, and the stupefaction in Jimmy's eyes. All this reinforces her decision. What would Mexico be like and how would Renato Leduc behave back home in Mexico? Would she be casting herself into the void? The Surrealists are her natural medium; they are her friends, accomplices, admirers, but Leonora is now a different woman. Santander has transformed her: it now accompanies and even awakens her every morning. It is forever present, within a hand's reach, there on her pillow. Of course New York is the Mecca of new art, of galleries and cultural events, of the life that at once reasserts itself in the wake of the war. Its opportunities too, despite the fact that Leonora has no clear idea of what she has to do, apart from one: leave Max. He cannot restrain her, because she knows what madness is. Not the madness idealised by André Breton, not the madness preached by Surrealist geniuses, but a madness she can reach out and touch every day, as it pursues her, thundering through all her senses.

Leonora reminds Max of a passage from *Alice in Wonderland*:

'Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?'

'That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,' says the Cat.

'I don't much care where —' says Alice.

'Then it doesn't matter which way you go,' says the Cat.

‘— so long as I get somewhere,’ Alice adds as an explanation.

‘Oh, you’re sure to do that,’ says the Cat, ‘if you only walk long enough.’

Max hugs Leonora: ‘Take *Leonora in the Morning Light*, it’s yours, a gift from me.’

Then Max returns home early to announce in lugubrious tones: ‘Leonora is leaving for Mexico with her Mexican.’

Her departure is Peggy’s victory, but the triumph lasts only briefly. Two months later, Max selects the young Dorothea Tanning as his next lover.

35. MEXICO

RENATO SEEMS LIKE A BREATH of fresh air to her during their journey to the capital, more so each time she opens the little window when they stop at a station to listen to the cries of the pedlars, all of whom have the same copper-coloured skin as her husband. His dark complexion opens a way into levity and carefreeness. Everyone chatters ceaselessly, and in the evening he regales her with:

'The night rolls on and so does the train
away down another track, all just the same
always someone setting their lonely bundle down
on a deserted platform as the train leaves town …'

He tells her he used to be a telegraphist, and Leonora realises that everything up until now has revolved around her, and that she knows hardly anything about him. Renato takes very little seriously, and doesn't set much store by what for her are questions of life and death. He served with the troops in the north of the country, and acquired the way of speaking of his fellow combatants. His French father chose to remain in Mexico and turned his son into a compulsive reader. Ever irreverent, Renato says things that should not be said, and does what should not be done. This attracts her. He had formed part of the *División del Norte*, and galloped alongside Pancho Villa and a journalist whom everyone called 'Chatito' ('Little Snub-Nose'), and who turned out to be the North American socialist John Reed.

'Just picture it, the horses travelled aboard the trains while we drank tea on the tarpaulin roofs, rifles at the ready, getting soaked and icy cold at night, making love — for just about every soldier brought a woman combatant along with him, and anyone who didn't was stuffed.'

'Your story about the horses captivates me, Renato!'

'Clearly you should have been born a Houyhnhnm.'

'Yes, theirs is the country I like best of all in *Gulliver's Travels*. It is the ideal world: horses are highly intelligent and never lie, whereas men are egotists and savages.'

'You should remember that the only person who gave Gulliver a good reception was the gentleman horse, for the others regarded him as a human being, and you are a human being, too.'

'Only from the outside, Renato. Inside I know I am a mare.'

'Do you know that Leonor Fini was offended by that word? In Argentina to call someone a "mare" is an insult.'

'To me it sounds like praise.'

Unlike Max, Renato has not the least wish to enlighten her, or to teach her anything. Instead, he seems to want only to make her laugh

and to forget all about black and rainy cities. The cold and timid skies over Paris, London or Rome aren't worth the candle, because now she is about to meet real sunlight, shining on houses built from volcanic rock and centuries-old trees, and two magnificent volcanoes, which have long been sleeping.

The train stopped for several hours at Houston station, and Renato decided to buy himself a cold beer. 'I am a man who haunts *cantinas* and cafés.' Scarcely had they entered a bar when the waiter approached them and told them that women were not allowed in, and that in any case Renato could not be served, being a Mexican. A sign at the entrance to the restaurant next door read *No dogs or Mexicans allowed*.

Leonora could not understand any of this.

On leaving Buenavista station in Mexico City, and following the main drag of the Paseo de la Reforma, Leonora sees horse riders wearing wide straw hats: 'This country is for me, I belong with the horses.'

The Federal District comprises a capital whose origins are a mirage, arising from a lake and erected upon its waters. Its inhabitants somehow manage to live on this unstable, treacherous salt marsh. Here what is or is not real merges into one.

'Does it look like Venice?' Leonora asks.

'It doesn't look like Venice in the slightest. It is a "city founded on economy/made of hydraulic material, in a lake which was aqueduct, drain and Hellespont".'

The image of Mexico City is an island that will eventually drown in mud.

The two of them set up home in an empty house in the Mixcoac district, and go to bed on a mattress that her Bohemian purchases in the first store he finds.

Renato's skin is strong, revealing a weighty energy, and so taut it looks beautiful. There is not a wrinkle on his elbows, smooth and tense, dark next to her skin, which looks pale and fragile. Every morning he bounds out of bed barefoot, while she is still hunting around for her slippers. In his white shirt, Renato looks an even deeper brown, and Leonora remembers Kay Boyle saying: 'your man is gorgeous'.

Leonora is handed ten *pesos* by Renato. He shows her how to buy bread from the bakery, and where to get lentils and a bottle of cooking oil from among the stores. What she likes most of all is that rat poison is sold in a box labelled 'The Last Supper'. She walks beneath the clear air of this high-altitude city, under a sky even more blue than that of St. Martin d'Ardèche. Leonora's heart beats faster, feels more alert, at such a height; a trick of the sun's light prevents her

from noticing a broken flagstone and she falls on to the pavement.

'Whatever happened to you, *guerita,* my fair one?'

A woman wearing a pinafore helps him to lift her up and Leonora decides that Mexicans are very kind. She accompanies her to her door and, when they bid one another farewell, the woman tells her that she is always there should Leonora need anything.

In Xochimilco the bustling crowds part to allow Renato and Leonora to pass between their sets of instruments and their big jars of rough cactus *pulque* and beer. Some of the canals are so obstructed by water lilies there is no longer a way through.

Leonora finds the boat ride boring.

'You should have drunk a couple of beers, that's what this place is about,' Renato tells her. 'Or you could have joined the musicians and sung us a round of *London Bridge is Falling Down.* Either you play your part or you're stuffed!'

Leonora speaks no Spanish and has to rely on Renato. When they walk down a street, the people make way for them, keeping their eyes fixed on their feet. After being among Spaniards who talk at the top of their voices, and North Americans who make the air around them stink, she ponders on why the Mexicans do themselves down so much. Their first rule of life seems to be to occupy the least possible amount of space.

She intuits that in the market place, among the mounds piled high with radishes and tomatoes, she might come to understand the stall-holders. But there is still no way she could communicate with anyone apart from Renato. In New York she was her own mistress, here she has to remain on the sidelines.

'Renato, I don't know who these people are, I don't know why they appear to be in flight, I don't know why the women hide their faces in their shawls, I can't bear them and I can't bear myself. I've no idea what I'm doing here in Mexico.'

At least Leonora likes the new house on the Calle Rosas Moreno, near to San Cosme, loving its height and spaciousness and its European style, even if it looks as if the walls are on the point of falling down.

A peasant is busily herding a flock of turkeys on the pavement outside.

'Why do the turkeys walk about in packs on the streets of Mexico City?'

'They are being sold from house to house, so the cooks can make *mole* out of them.'

'What is *mole*?'

'*Du poulet au chocolat* — a fowl cooked in chocolate sauce,' and Renato smiles.

On the street corner next morning, Leonora discovers a band of miniature dancing dogs. Standing on their hind legs, they jump to the sound of a drum and flute played by their masters, a man and a woman. Passers-by throw them spare coins and when the dogs are allowed to get down on all fours again, their eyes stop looking so imploring.

'They train them in a *comal*, like a big metal paella pan. The terror of burning their paws forces them to keep on dancing.'

'What a cruel country! Yesterday the turkeys, today the miniature dogs.'

'Today I shall take you to Sanborn's, the perfect venue for Dadaists. You'll adore it.'

Leonora is surprised because as soon as they are seated, one friend after another comes over to give Renato a hug, making it impossible for him to eat. Their pleasure is obvious. After a while Leonora eats her meal alone, and Renato's *xochitl* soup congeals into grease.

Every day Leduc is taken over by yet more friends. Leonora memorises the word *cantina*. Men make their rendezvous there and, quite unlike in Europe, meals are regularly prolonged until nightfall.

'And what is this animal doing here, Leonora?'

'I picked him up on the street.' The dog makes himself scarce. 'He followed me and I've called him Dicky.'

The next evening, Renato enquires: 'What is this new dog doing here?'

'She's a bitch and I've named her Daisy. I found her wounded, and I also found a little kitten I'm calling Kitty.'

'This is impossible! Where are we going to put them all? I don't even like animals, ever since I was bitten by a police dog.'

'Police dogs do not count as animals.'

'So what are they then?' Renato is making fun of her.

'They are poor perverted creatures who have lost their animal mentality. If they had not lost it, I would be able to communicate with them. I can talk to any animal at all, apart from a police dog.'

The yellow dog lifts his head and Daisy, the bitch, gazes up at her with beseeching eyes. Leonora must have called them many times over, for they now recognise their names.

'I've already bathed them, so they are free of fleas now. Only the bedbugs have begun crawling up the walls.'

Renato figures that living with Leonora in Mexico is going to be difficult.

'You get rid of bedbugs with sulphur. Go down to the shop, buy some sulphur and burn them off. After a while you'll see them fall down dead, when the smoke suffocates them.'

‘But I don’t want to kill anything.’

‘Good, then I’ll do it myself tomorrow night, as soon as I get in from work.’

‘What work?’

‘I am a journalist, Leonora. I was a diplomat, as you know, and now I work on a newspaper.’

On the streets of this hostile city, Leonora sees mule trains forced to carry wooden planks on their backs and donkeys with the saddest eyes, even sadder than the eyes of the dancing dogs.

‘I saw one poor man carrying a wardrobe with two enormous mirrored doors.’

‘Yes, that’s the porter who works for the vast covered market at La Merced.’

‘How horrific! And why do people go around barefoot here?’

It is a pleasure to go to the city centre in an open tram with wooden seats, rattling across green fields and flowering gardens, straight through the downtown district where the streets are named after rivers: Mississippi, Ganges, Seine, Duero, and Guadalquivir.

‘How fortunate it is that there are so few houses and so few people, all of them in such a hurry and so liable to disappear!’

From within her loneliness, Leonora watches time passing. Will Renato ever understand what time is? She smokes, waits, looks out of the window. All of a sudden, when she turns her head towards the kitchen, she sees a small red bird on the back of a chair. It is as red as an altar boy’s alb, as red as a blood clot. She does not understand how it managed to get in, since the door and the windows are still shut. She holds out a piece of banana to it, for what else has she got to give it to eat? The bird takes flight, only to return again to peck at some prodigiously tiny milligram of food. Dicky has nothing to say, but Kitty stares at the bird as she keeps on licking her fur.

‘The best thing for you would be a little piece of red meat or a chicken wing, but I won’t let you eat a bird.’

The song of Don Mazarino, as she christens the little bird, is a strident one. Leonora’s heart pounds in her body, and the song spurs her on like a whip lashing the air: ‘Leonora, *do* something for yourself.’

But the loneliness won’t give way. At about six in the evening, a legion of horses surge forth from Great Britain, across the Atlantic and Leonora surrenders beneath their galloping hooves. They swim between the war ships, parachutes and dead soldiers, then their dextrous and rapid hooves loudly pound their way up Calle Rosas Moreno, named after the great Mexican fabulist of fairy tales. The horses leave behind their prophecies and Leonora records them.

‘Read them Renato, they are terrible. What is coming our way

will be terrible.'

Renato embraces her.

'I so need Dicky, Daisy, Kitty — all of them — to keep me company.'

'Why don't you accompany *me,* Leonora? Let yourself become part of the country, know about it before you decide to reject it.'

'It's just that I don't understand anything about it at all.'

They move to Flat 3, number 110 on the Calle Artes, in the same district. Renato takes her to Danubio and to Prendes, the finest restaurants in the colonial part of the city. He is an immensely popular client, and wherever he goes bottles of fine wine are sent over to his table. He is embraced with loud claps on the back, resounding like drum beats. This is Renato the drum. Every time he opens his mouth, the guffaws are deafening, and Leonora and the rest of the customers look at him as he is subjected to further congratulations: 'How charming your new lady is!' 'Look what a pretty girl you've brought home with you!'

Renato keeps her waiting. Nothing worse for holding on to one's sanity than having to keep walking round a room in circles, opening books without being able to settle to reading the pages inside, or than getting up and going back to bed again. She doesn't even manage to cry. 'What shall I do tomorrow? Whatever time will Renato come home? What am I going to wake up to tomorrow?' The hooves galloping around her head prevent her from falling asleep. Perhaps it is all due to the altitude. The city stands at over two thousand metres above sea level. Lack of sleep translates into a kind of daily paralysis and Leonora spends most of the day sitting on a chair beside the window. It is hot. Leonora was under an illusion when she believed that her life would continue much as it had in New York, and now the solitude is asphyxiating. So much heat out of doors, and she indoors with time standing still.

She opens the door and outside a white dog stares fixedly at her. It is almost as big as a pony.

'Come in, Pete.'

When he sees him, Renato offers no further protest and Pete follows him. They leave the house together in the morning, and Pete accompanies Renato to the tram stop before returning home alone. When Renato returns at night, Pete is the only creature he greets. Leonora, for her part, dries her tears.

'I can't cope with myself any more.'

'Then come along with me, eh? You can sit down in the editorial office at *El Universal*, while I finish my article and then we'll go out and down a few shots of tequila.'

'No. Your *cantinas* and your friends scare me.'

‘Then at least open the front door: going out on the street is a remedy for almost every calamity. Look, Leonora, the traffic doesn’t annoy me, any more than the heat or the distance across town. It doesn’t even bother me not having a destination in mind. Getting out of the house is getting out of yourself: jump, eh? Get out and try it out.’

‘I don’t know anyone in the city and I don’t speak the language.’

Renato’s failure to pay her any attention grows worse by the day and Leonora has no idea how to integrate into his group of friends, who enquire: ‘Are you going to bring your English lady with you?’

‘No, I am not going to bring her with me. The bitch of a woman talks more to the dog than to me.’

‘She’s cute.’

‘Yes, her looks are cute but she still doesn’t fit the frame.’

‘Give her time and take care of her, otherwise someone will steal her.’

Leonora keeps mulling over the question of what she is doing in Mexico. ‘I’ve made a terrible mistake.’ She takes her dogs out for a walk and misses Renato, who taps away on his Remington in the editorial office of a daily newspaper whose name she forgets.

A young man with dark skin, wearing overalls, is looking for him on the Calle Artes.

‘Is Renato in? We need him to come to court to help us to get a friend out of prison.’

Leonora never knows where he is and asks herself if his tapping on the keyboard has anything in common with that of the Prince of Monaco in the mental asylum, and what the point is of so much rushing about. Everything that Renato had once left far behind is now submerging him in a whirlwind of parties. The politicians set their appointments for three in the afternoon, and their lunches turn into dinners. Renato is always at the centre of all the merry-making.

‘Leonora this will pass, they are celebrating my return but it won’t always be like this.’ Leduc makes his excuses. ‘You have been a hit with everyone, so don’t be such a wet flannel and come out with me tonight.’

‘You have no need of me whatsoever.’

It is true that after a number of meals that somehow get protracted until midnight, Renato forgets about her amid all the laughter and applause. Every word he utters is received with jubilation, but Leonora does not understand him, nor does she wish to join in the clink of glasses or put up with the noisy racket of their surroundings.

‘Don’t pull that face, they’re my friends.’

Renato once belonged to her, but back in Mexico he reverts to his

hardened old drinking companions.

'Count your blessings,' Nanny used to say, and Leonora lists them all: 'Mexico is far from the claws of my father and Imperial Chemical. Carrington will never manage to reach me here. I'm now free of Max's tutelage, and I'll recuperate just like I recovered from what happened in Santander. Renato Leduc and his carefree way of looking at life are good for me. What's too much for me are his friends.'

When dawn appears, anguish once more spreads across her pillow. So Leonora leaps from the bed and sits down at the window, hearing Renato announce in French: 'I'm off to the newspaper, we'll meet up again this evening.' In Mexico City millions of birds are singing, but here just one of them keeps her company: Don Mazarino.

When Renato does not return, Leonora goes back to her dreams. 'If I dream, I'll be able to free myself from loneliness.' She is back in the greenhouse at Crookhey Hall, hot and humid at any time of year. She used to go outside in December, to go into the winter garden and smell the damp earth, now and forever associated with her childhood, and the memory caught her off-balance. From every flowerpot there once sprouted prodigious greenery and amid the vast profusion of creepers, Leonora used to feel herself evaporate in smoke. Standing still and watching a leaf uncoil between nightfall and dawn caused something green and silky to buzz within her.

Memories of her childhood help her to get through the day. If only the hours would go by faster and faster, if only the night would come when she could at last forget her memories of Max, Peggy, the Doctors Morales, Frau Asegurado and even Nanny, for who might know how or if she could ever get back to England.

Ever since she arrived in Mexico, Leonora has felt small and overlooked and she hates it. She dreams of being able to enter the body of a bear but, however hard she tries, the animal never properly materialises. 'Renato, I am beginning to despise myself, and that is totally unacceptable. I want to experience myself as enormous, powerful and beautiful.' Her dialogue is with the absent Renato.

'Mexico City must have a British Embassy somewhere …'

36. THE BLUE HOUSE

ON CALLE RIO LERMA 71, in the Cuauhtemoc district, she finds her way to a house built in the grand European style. It is the British Embassy.

'You cannot bring your dogs in here.'

'I am British.'

'But it is obvious from a mile off that your animals are Mexican.'

Leonora is so beautiful that the porter waits with her while he sends for a secretary who keeps her waiting in an interminable queue.

'Give me your address and we'll send you invitations to all the different activities that Great Britain puts on in Mexico.'

At dawn, women emerge to sweep the street with brooms made of twigs. Never, in any of the cities around the world that she has ever visited, has Leonora seen each person sweeping their own stretch of road with such great care. The women work very slowly and assiduously, using a sack to gather up little heaps of leaves and the litter left by passers-by, then take it home so that a day or two later it can all be loaded up on a lorry that announces its arrival with a clanging bell. She decides to write to Maurie and send on her new address. From New York, she had sent her mother postcards of the Empire State Building and the Statue of Liberty.

'As long as Max is there, it's impossible for me to come and visit you,' Maurie had replied, in the italic handwriting of a Catholic schoolgirl.

At the British Embassy, Leonora meets Elsie Fulda, an Anglo-Saxon of exceptionally strong character whom she immediately finds sympathetic. She is the wife of a Mexican businessman, Manuel Escobedo, with a house on the Calle Durango that is an oasis. Elsie sings to a friend's piano accompaniment, as she enjoys sharing. She also plays the viola, and when her daughter Helen asks her: 'Why not the violin, Mama? It's smaller and more manageable,' Elsie answers: 'Because there are few violas and many violins.' With her strength of character and her talent for arranging parties, Elsie succeeds in having an entire cultural life revolve around her home. She at once recognises Leonora's talent, and the artists arriving from Europe all seek her out. 'Your problems will find their solution,' she announces at the top of her voice. She helps Sándor Roth, the cello maestro who, together with Joszef Smilovits, Imre Hartmann and Jenö Léner, set themselves up as the Léner Quartet. She even finds a way for the refugees from the Spanish Civil War to release their anguish. 'I shall organise a series of talks.' Her dynamism lifts people's spirits. 'We have to begin over again, there's no such thing as sitting down and crying in a corner.

Mexico has an immense amount to offer. Our time between birth and death passes in the blink of an eye. You need to realise that if you don't do something for yourself, nobody else will do it for you.'

At Elsie's house, Leonora meets up with Catherine Yarrow again. She has recently arrived from London and is now called Cath by the Escobedos. The three Englishwomen feel at home together.

Alice Rahon and Wolfgang Paalen frequently visit the house, installing themselves on the big living-room sofa, and remaining there motionless. Their topics of conversation are painting, Mexico and pre-Colombian art. After dinner, Alice captivates everyone by reciting her poetry aloud. Paalen has them model little plasticine figures. They chat until all hours of the night then finally bid one another farewell, because Leonora has started to repeat over and over again how she had been injected with Cardiazol.

'Your artist friend is a little eccentric, don't you think?' Escobedo asks his wife.

'Don't worry about her sudden mood swings. I prefer her craziness to the passivity of your business friends, whose wives' conversation consists only of babies and nannies.'

Despite his reservations, Manuel Escobedo takes Leonora under his wing:

'Look, if you have any kind of a problem, I shall help you find the help you need.'

'I need to write to Maurie, my mother. At the moment I'm without a bean.'

When Leonora returns at night to the third floor on the Calle Artes, she no longer cares about Renato. 'Now I am making my own way,' she tells herself comfortingly, and soon falls asleep with Kitty curled up on her shoulder.

Renato takes her to Calle Londres in Coyoacán, to a fiesta being held by Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo. Drawn by her beauty, Diego tells her:

'You have something of Paulette Goddard about you.'

'I do? And who might she be?'

'She was Charlie Chaplin's wife.'

'Chaplin is a genius. I'll take that as a compliment.'

Diego, as always dressed in dungarees, sits down beside her, bent on being a source of amusement. The Blue House, packed to the rafters with people who wander from living room to kitchen, tequila in hand, has the air of both a popular fairground and a rodeo about it. Some of the guests, dressed in bright woven fabrics with traditional shawls over their shoulders, surround a man dressed in a suit and tie: his name is Fernando Gamboa. The women are spectacular: flowery petticoats, hooped gold earrings and plaits braided with coloured

wools. Several have their heads bowed down under the weight of necklaces composed of pre-Colombian stones. Dressing like a woman from Tehuana and wearing a shawl over your head or shoulders is all the rage.

'Do they dress like this every day?' Leonora asks Diego in astonishment.

'No of course not, only when they come to fiestas like this. The rest of the time they dress just like you do. Then I undress them and paint them in the nude.'

Leonora stays well away from Frida Kahlo and her hair plaited with coloured ribbons. She is put off by her strident manner of speaking and the huddled chorus of women who follow her around singing her every praise. She concludes: 'I think that smoking is probably the one thing we have in common.'

Alice Rahon, by contrast, fabulously beautiful with her long black hair crowned with flowers from which only her arms emerge, identifies strongly with Frida.

'I love her and we both know what it is to be confined to a bed, and what it is to lose a child.'

Leonora feels harassed by all the shouting, just like in the *cantina*, with the guffawing and the back-slapping that always accompanies greetings. What a racket! Not even the guitarists pause for breath. All of a sudden a tequila-inebriated guest yells: 'Oh how great it is to be flying high at two in the morning. Oh how great to fly so high. Ay Mama!' As soon as they see their glasses emptying, the waiters refill them with shots of tequila, and bring more bottles of beer before it can be ordered, running from one side of the room to the other. Their thirst is insatiable and no-one is drinking water. Some have had several too many, and are crying out for their mums. A man with a droopy moustache, and dressed in black, cries into his checked scarf, another combs his hair with a fork, and a woman swathed in gold chains offers thanks for the Blessed Revolution.

Leonora cannot stand the constant screech of guitars and the interminable accompaniment of 'ay, ay, ay!' She remembers hearing how Napoleon once exclaimed: 'How I wish they would stop that infernal noise!'

'It is not exactly intelligence which stands out here. What I mostly see all around me is sentimentalism,' comments Leonora.

'All these types are syphilitic Prometheuses,' replies Renato.

Next day, Leonora goes to see Diego Rivera's frescos.

'They are not exactly my cup of tea,' she tells Renato in English.

A month later, Renato takes her back to the Blue House and she, cigarette in hand, is pulled up short by Diego when he tells her he eats human flesh:

‘Look here, Diego, don’t take the piss. I’m not a tourist here, I’m English and Irish.’

‘And I am Mexican Indian.’

‘You don’t have the face of an Indian.’

‘Don’t I? What sort of a face do I have, then?’

‘The face of a baker or a cobbler. My husband looks far more Indian than you do.’

‘And who is your husband?’

‘Renato Leduc.’

‘Ah, you should have started by telling me that.’

Diego is intrigued by this importunate little Englishwoman. ‘Listen, Renato, tell me — where did you find her? She’s divine. And I thought you were her tutor in Spanish.’ The fiesta seems like a carnival to Leonora, everyone circulating like the terracotta jugs filled with hooch. The clamour of voices and cheers sets her nerves on edge. The recurrent topic of conversation is the Mexican Revolution. Leonora is told that tonight Frida will not leave her bedroom, where she is taking care of a girlfriend.

‘You really should take a look at her four-poster bed.’

A deer shivers with fear in the garden, and a green parrot with yellow eyes screeches: ‘Mediocrity! Mediocrity!’ A guest tells Leonora: ‘Frida taught it to say that.’

There are also monkeys who won’t leave their owner alone and spend their lives festooned around his neck like black pendants.

Leonora sees Orozco just once and is repelled by his choleric red complexion and Frida — whom she might have got on with better — is always either convalescing or about to be taken into hospital.

‘Look, Renato, I left New York behind me because I didn’t want to be part of Peggy’s retinue. In Mexico I am certainly not going to join Diego and Frida’s.’

Most Mexican men, Diego included, show off by sticking a pistol in their belt.

‘I lived a part of my life sitting on a bomb and I know what war is. I won’t put up with this kind of bravado!’

Shoot-outs erupt on the city streets. Fireworks explode in church aisles, at neighbourhood weddings and at national festivals. Gunpowder is always around, and at the slightest provocation Mexicans yell: ‘I’ll shoot you, you bastard!’

Renato invites Francisco Zendejas and Juan Arvizu round to the house. Arvizu sings them *Santa* and *Concha Nácar*. Leonora thoroughly enjoys herself and they return three days later and Arvizu intones, guitar in hand: ‘There are just three things in life: health, cash and love.’ To which Leonora responds: ‘There are just three things in life: Dicky, Daisy and Kitty.’ When Leonora renames Zendejas *Pendejas* —

Tosser — Renato excuses her:

'It's because she's English and doesn't know how to pronounce your surname.'

The Englishwoman makes Arvizu laugh by asking him if he'd like 'una chingada tequila' — a fucking tequila, and a common catch-phrase.

'Hey Renato, is this the Spanish you're teaching her?'

'She has a prodigious memory,' Renato defends himself.

Leonora croons *London Bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down* … for she feels as if it is falling down for her, too.

37. TANGUITO

LEONORA LEARNS THAT SUNDAYS are for the bulls, or that the bulls are what make a Sunday. More than going to Mass or taking a rest, and still more than pulling down the metallic blinds: it's then the whole city revolves around the bullring.

Renato will never miss a bullfight for anyone or anything.

'Don't go!'

In Lisbon they were on the same side, they laughed as one; here in Mexico, Renato seems like another person. Leonora never imagined she would be walking down the street followed by Dicky.

In the house on the Calle Artes, the former Russian Embassy which still retains some of its former splendour, Renato shakes his head, looks her in the eyes and asks her:

'Are you sad or just pissed off?'

'It's been too long since I went horse-riding.'

'There's an easy solution to that, Leonora. Haven't you noticed the riders trotting up the main Paseo de la Reforma? It's not a problem. I'll talk to my friend Rodolfo Gaona and ask him to loan me one of his horses, and you can ride out any time the fucking mood takes you!'

Gaona, whose nickname is 'the Caliph', feels an immediate sympathy for 'Renato's Englishwoman' and lends her a chestnut stallion.

'If it doesn't work out for you on the chestnut, I have a white mare called Highland Queen, so that you can ride through the woods and arrive at the castle like the princess you are.'

She goes for a canter up the Paseo de la Reforma in the grey lonely mornings, and other riders start to greet her with a nod of the head. There are almost no people at all around, the ride is on the flat, and excitement is restricted to a pack of street dogs that bark and cause a fuss when the horse passes by. Could there be *sidhes* in Chapultepec? The hundred-year-old Montezuma cypresses are imposing in their grandeur.

A week later, still wearing her jodhpurs, the Englishwoman tells Rodolfo Gaona:

'Now I've learnt the hack from the Paseo de la Reforma up to the castle by heart, and taken four thousand turns around the lake, I don't think I'll go riding again.'

'Would you like to join a Horse Club? You could go out to a ranch, meet cowboys at the corral, and lasso fillies.'

'I don't ride bareback, only on a saddle, and watching cowboys throw horses to the ground in an arena revolts me.'

‘Perhaps you would be more attracted by the bulls. You and Renato could come on Sunday.’

‘In a bullring in the south of France I saw a *tienta* where they were trialling fighting bull calves, and couldn’t stand the whole spectacle.’

‘But here the fiesta will charm you. Being a bullfighter is a science, and an art too, and you are an artist.’

That night, Renato tries to persuade her. Antonin Artaud compared the rites of Plato’s Atlantis with the bull sacrifices offered by the Tarahumara Indians: ‘One of these days we’ll go out to the Tarahumara sierra. I’ve got loads of friends in Chihuahua and at one point I even had a Rarámuri girlfriend.’

The colours of the square are blue and gold. Leonora and Renato, seated in the front row next to Gaona, are growing excited with anticipation. Gaona is king, everyone salutes him, greeting him with compliments: ‘You killed seven bulls on the day of your departure.’ ‘Nobody to touch you, Gaona.’ ‘*Torero.*’ His fans idolise him as the inventor of the *gaonera* pass. Renato is also popular, and they think the pretty young woman at his side must be some kind of a starlet. Leonora catches remarks here and there: ‘For the past twenty-four hours, the bull has been shut up in total darkness.’ ‘They filed his horns to make it safer for the bullfighter.’ ‘They hit his balls and struck him in the kidneys before taking him out into the ring.’ ‘They didn’t hit the brute hard enough.’

After the march past of the *toreros* in their pink stockings and their glittering *trajes de luces*, the first bull with his obsidian coat is released. Tanguito — the bull — smashes into the barrier in an attempt to leap over it.

‘He only wants to flee,’ Leonora comments. ‘The crowd has blinded and deafened him. Why do they yell like this, Renato?’

‘Olé! Olé! Olé!’ they howl from behind, and chorus the names Leduc and Gaona. Leonora boos: ‘Booo!’ And when the bull crashes into the bullring, she jumps to her feet and applauds him. Tanguito leaps the barrier and everyone starts running away. Leonora gives him a solo standing ovation. The public start throwing bottles and cushions.

‘Toro, toro, toro,’ the picador calls to him from his high saddle. Tanguito jumps this way and that, hopping as if hot chillies had been smeared on his hooves.

‘Why won’t he calm down? What’s going to happen to the horse?’ Leonora asks. ‘What the devil is this joker doing with a lance in his hand?’

‘The horses are at the end of their lives. They’re for the knacker’s yard and covered in a mattress for protection. They die after three or

four bullfights because the bull breaks their ribs or disembowels them.'

'Renato, I hate you,' Leonora tells him, clenching her teeth and her fists.

All at once, the bull charges at full strength, and the picador digs his lance into his spinal column. Leonora raises her hand to her mouth. The bull is pouring blood. The *banderillas*, stuck almost into the same spot, are hanging from the beast's skin, ripping it open so the blood flows freely over his coat.

'He is losing so much blood!' Leonora is at her wits' end.

Bewildered, Tanguito no longer lifts up his head. He looks directly at Leonora with moist eyes. Leonora tugs at Renato's sleeve.

'I am certain he looked at me. We have to do something, Renato. Put a stop to all of this and save Tanguito! He implored me to save his life and what's going on here is a crime.'

Renato tries to calm her down.

'It's almost all over, all apart from the finest part. Now you can see the matador make his final passes before the bull.'

Leonora protests: 'I can't stand any more of this.'

A sword measuring eighty centimetres was concealed beneath the red cape. The bullfighter swiftly pulled it out, pointing the tip at the bull's head, plumb between the two horns. When the bull charges he plunges the sword in deep, right up to the hilt. He severs the main artery, stabbing the lungs and the pleural membrane, the liver and the heart. The bull hits the side of the bullring, his eyes are petrified in amazement, as if he has a question to ask Leonora before he falls. Then he is no longer a bull, no longer even an animal, he is no more than a dead weight on the sand, all his nobility caked in blood and dirt on the sand. The fiesta over, the bull is in his death throes, blood gushing through his mouth and nostrils. Tanguito dies, drowning in his own blood. The torero inserts a large sword that ends in a sort of knife. Gaona explains:

'This is what is called the *descabello*.'

Leonora cries out: 'I'm leaving.'

'Wait, don't go. They are going to finish him off.'

Leonora gets to her feet while Leduc and Gaona tug at her arms.

'I didn't do a thing for him! What could I have done?' Leonora is in tears and confronts Renato: 'You can't both be a good person and enjoy going to bullfights. I can't live with someone who celebrates the death of a defenceless animal.'

Gaona smiles: 'You look even prettier when you're angry.'

They drag the bull off outside the ring.

'Where are they taking him?'

'To the abattoir.'

‘And what happens if he’s still conscious?’

‘You’re crazy!’ Renato replies.

He doesn’t realise that she has been wounded by the same stab as the bull.

Renato comes home late every night, but arguing with Renato is a complete waste of energy. Whenever he returns, Leonora carries on her conversations alone or with Pete. ‘Dicky, Daisy, Kitty, we’re going out for a walk around the block.’ Her loneliness grows and, from within his whirlwind, Renato loses sight of her. Increasingly self-absorbed, Leonora stares straight ahead as she walks. One morning she tells him:

‘Renato, I don’t know what I am doing, being here with you. I don’t want to make a scene — that would be sordid and unworthy of you as well as me, but I don’t know why I am chained up here. I feel insignificant, I am not a part of anything bigger than myself, I don’t know where I am and I don’t like that feeling. I want to feel myself as big and powerful, and you just can’t imagine how tiring it is to be alone with oneself the whole day long.’

‘You’ve already told me that stuff about being big and powerful twice over. I’ve bought you canvases and paints. What’s going on is that you refuse to adjust. Let’s see now … what have you painted today? You see, the egg you painted turned out all wrong. Put some passion into it, paint another egg, then I’ll bring you the laying hen and at the end of it all you’ll have your cock of the walk.’

‘We live in different worlds.’

‘Staring into emptiness for hours the way you do is a loser’s game. Come on, get yourself together, and we’ll go drink a tequila. You’re a big hit with my friends.’

‘I don’t understand your world.’

‘When you learn Spanish, then you will.’

‘I don’t think so, even then.’

‘So, what’s the remedy for that, then?’

‘What I dream of at night.’

Renato looks at her thoughtfully and for a long while: ‘I have to work and you have to work harder and do whatever the hell it is you need to do to be happy. Here’s your easel, here are your colours. Now get painting. You are the only person apparently hell-bent on making your own misery by being such a wimp. And there is no greater cry-baby than somebody immersed in self-pity.’

‘That’s not what it’s about. I’m the victim of my inability to hate you. I never know how to take my revenge on you.’

‘Nobody’s forcing you to stay with me, Leonora!’

‘Impotent rage is a torture. I stay indoors sitting alone and become afraid of everything, including Mexico, including you.’

‘Then get rid of your hatred by painting it out of you — paint your fantasies, paint your dogs and your cat, paint your childhood memories, paint your mother, paint Ireland, paint a dozen horses, paint and don’t be an idiot, loathe me while you paint, but do something!’

‘But I did something,’ Leonora protests. ‘I painted a mare.’

‘Where is it?’

‘Propped facing the wall …’

Renato finds it, turns it around.

‘This is fucking marvellous.’

‘She is a mare who longs to jump through the window, but is being restrained by two guards.’

‘I swear this is a really good painting.’

‘I also painted another one,’ Leonora is now growing animated. ‘*Artes 110*, it’s our address and I’ve painted our flat on the third floor, although I still think something is missing. The only thing that really came out well was a horse’s head.’

Renato hugs her.

‘Let others do the art criticism. I’ve seen a great many paintings and I promise you that yours is really alive. Are you going to carry on now, yes or no?’

‘Yes, I think that now perhaps I can …’

‘You see? You really don’t have to take yourself so seriously.’

38. REMEDIOS VARO

AFEW BLOCKS FROM HER HOUSE, Leonora suddenly stops dead, as if struck by lightning. In the Calle Gabino Barreda, in the district of San Rafael, in the middle of a plot of wasteland, she sees Remedios Varo. Remedios recognises her at the same instant.

'What are you doing here? What a fantastic surprise!'

Remedios looks at her as if she's seen a ghost.

'Is it really you, Leonora?'

'And you, Remedios?'

'I came here with Benjamin.' She smiles at Leonora with her wide almond-shaped eyes in her heart-shaped face, complemented by a head of tousled red hair. 'I live here on this street at number 18. I just came down for some cigarettes, but come in and see where I live. Kati Horna and Esteban Francés live just over there.'

Leonora follows her up the steps as if ascending to heaven. Dicky follows her, his snout stuck to the steps, his tail held high, Daisy, too, is clearly getting interested.

'May my dogs come in?'

'Of course they can. But won't they scare my cats?'

'They do whatever I say, and get on fine with Kitty, my little white cat who is at home having her afternoon siesta.'

For the first time since she came to Mexico, Leonora feels at ease. Inside the flat which Remedios shares with Benjamin Péret, she is greeted by a provocative drawing by Picasso, stuck to the wall with a thumb tack, and another phallic image by Tanguy, as well as yet one more she knew well already, by Ernst. She is on familiar territory.

'Please do me the honour of entering my humble home, as the Mexicans say.'

Kati Horna holds both her hands out to her. The three women had fled the war: Kati from Spain, with her case of photographs and the Andalusian sculptor, José Horna. They kept on going from Ellis Island until they arrived in Mexico on 31st October 1939. Remedios and Benjamin Péret suffered extreme danger crossing the Atlantic in a Portuguese ship, the *Serpa Pinto*, whose captain had the reputation, in fits of madness, of throwing his passengers overboard into the sea. It finally set out from Marseilles and docked in Morocco. Leonora, brought over by Renato, is the one who of the three of them, ran the least risk of all, since at the age of twenty-six, all dangers are challenges.

'I left by ship from Lisbon, heading for New York. I stayed there a year with Renato Leduc, who wanted to return home to his native country.'

‘Benjamin and I were in the Villa Air-Bel in Marseilles. Varian Fry and the Emergency Rescue Committee did indeed rescue us, and we departed Casablanca for New York. We came to Mexico because there was not the faintest chance that Péret would be given an entry visa.’

‘Claude Lévi-Strauss, Wilfredo Lam and his wife Elena, Victor Serge, Laurette Séjourné and their son left together for Martinique. Pierre Mabille is also here, who got out via Haiti,’ adds Benjamin Péret.

‘José got violently seasick and spent the crossing throwing up, so he remained shut up in the cabin,’ Kati Horna was laughing, ‘and while this was going on, the captain invited me to sit at his table. “But I don’t have any clothes apart from those I’m standing up in,” I told him. “It doesn’t matter, doesn’t matter at all. You are young and beautiful.” Every evening I dined on caviar and foie-gras and drank Campari sodas.’

Kati has the gift of looking on the bright side of life.

‘Once in New York they told us that there was nothing but two first-class tickets left on the ship about to depart for Mexico. Other Jews, refugees like ourselves, scraped together the money. Now José and I live in a splendid house on the Calle Tabasco, just a few blocks from here. I’ll invite you round for tea. You don’t mind that I only have two cups and two teaspoons, do you?’

Kati chatters on like Marcel Duchamp’s coffee mill. She rises early and leaves home with her camera on her shoulder. By the end of the day, her shoes are covered in dust and Remedios adds that she always sees her then, dog-tired. She takes the tram from one end of the city to another, as she takes photos for magazines with a very small circulation and which pay still smaller fees. And she is so beautiful and generous that others take advantage of her.

‘I think I could give classes in photography.’

‘Well and good. As long as you don’t advertise classes of one hour and then stay another five and let everyone exploit you,’ Remedios warns her.

Leonora offers to accompany her home to the Calle Tabasco and, on reaching her front door, since Kati has not yet finished telling her story, she takes her by the arm and leads her on towards her own house.

‘Keep me company again, Leonora, back to my place.’

‘Please Kati, that’s enough for now.’

From that moment on, Leonora no longer feels herself to be alone, Remedios and Kati’s friendship makes all the difference. Apart from her time, Kati doesn’t know what more she can offer her. ‘Are you cold? Here, take my jumper.’ Small and intelligent, she is also dynamic and highly observant, bringing home news of the outside

world. Seeing her appear in her tartan skirt is already a treat. Kati is not the slightest bit fashion-conscious. In contrast, Remedios clinches her wide belt another notch around her already tiny waist, wears only black and has two smart pairs of high heels. Nine years older than Leonora, she is the animator, the teacher, the one with whom all the men fall in love, yet who still protects Benjamin, while she permits herself the luxury of collecting stray cats and turning them into talismans as she does stones, sea shells, and the crystals with which she adorns her library.

Being together protects them, and they take shelter, holding each other by the hand.

'We lived in clandestinity,' Remedios says, 'and we've now grown used to it.'

'In clandestinity and with frugality,' adds Benjamin, who still has not found work.

'We have friends,' Remedios says soothingly. 'Look how much Paalen loves you!'

In New York, thanks to Breton, Paalen put his painting *Combat of the Saturnine Princes II* at the disposal of Peggy Guggenheim, to sell on his behalf and so resolve Péret's financial problems.

Wolfgang, Alice and Eva come over from San Angel. Paalen looks very pale, for the impossibility of returning to Austria pains him. Years earlier, the Nazis put his name on the list of 'degenerate artists', just as they did with Max. Alice is a poet, but Paalen introduces her to painting, just as he propels Eva Sulzer towards photography.

'There's no such thing as art, only artists,' is Paalen's opinion. If Homer or Rembrandt or Shakespeare had never been born, becoming an artist would be just the same as taking up any other kind of job.'

'The artist is a supreme egotist,' interrupts Eva Sulzer.

'It is a simple matter to destroy them,' ventures Remedios.

'I consider art to be a skill,' interjects José Horna.

'It may be a skill but I paint with my emotions, desires, fantasies and fears; I put my skill at the service of my self, my *noir animal*, my unconscious opens the door for me, and through it I can reach the point of intense suffering,' alleges Alice Rahon vehemently.

'Then you are a masochist,' says Paalen, laughing.

Remedios' friendship is like an open patio to Leonora, as was the green garden that surrounds Hazelwood Hall. She knows that, for her, solitude is now over. Remedios is her ideal foil, she finishes the sentences she can only begin, her smile embraces her, she is her twin sister. Nobody is of as much interest to her as she is, she longs to show Remedios her canvases, the short stories she has been writing, tell her her life story. 'May she love me — what I want more than anything else at this moment in time is that Remedios will come to love me.'

For her part, Remedios, too, feels tenderly towards this slim, highly unusual figure, who turns up at midday and offers to help out in the kitchen.

'Ever since I first met you I became all the more Leonora. Before, I didn't know who I was. Now my dogs bark and my cat miaows, but until now they never spoke a word to me.'

To discover Remedios is to cling tightly to a lifebelt, to walk beside Kati is to move forward at twice the speed, José Horna, the Andalusian, loves life and seizes hold of it with joy:

'How handsome José is!'

'Yes, I got to know him in the International Anarchist Federation, and he asked for photos to use in making his posters.'

'At last I don't feel as if I'm sinking.'

'Were you falling into the well? I know what that's like,' says Remedios. 'What's important is that you don't discount your own thoughts.'

'It's more that I can't paint, nothing comes out.'

'Something is bound to come out. Look, for the time being, all we need is a pair of scissors,' says Remedios, covering the table with sheets of newspaper. 'We'll find something. I collected photos of human organs, medicaments, surgical operations, plants, flowers and animals in some medical magazines. They're perfect for making collages. See here we have a shoe catalogue. See, Kati and Leonora, we can turn this stove into a dancer's body and if we can find some plucked chickens, it would be great to stick them on to her head like a crown.'

Leonora returns Kati's smile, Kati who never seems to tire with so much running around the city centre.

'Why don't you come over tomorrow evening and meet Gunther Gerzso? He is really amusing.'

Leonora turns up with her dogs, and Remedios' wide smile reassures her that she is welcome.

'See here, I've got these little scraps of fabric for you. They are to make dolls with. Do you like sewing? I sew everything here, and I can even tailor a proper women's suit.'

That afternoon, Leonora makes her first doll.

'It chimes with me in some way I can't comprehend,' she explains to Remedios. 'According to the Celts, each one of us has a double. Maybe this doll will become my double.'

'Did you stitch your heart?'

'Yes, and I joined it to my head.'

Week after week, Leonora brings over more dolls.

'This one has a nose as wide as a turnip, perhaps some day I'll get it finished. This one has turned out just like Mlle. Varenne. And the

other one you have here contains a peyote plant inside it, and I've been told it can live for many years,' she announces with a mischievous glint in her eyes.

'What a good training you've had, Leonora,' Kati says to her.

'Yes it was a real training, undertaken *to kill time* as we say in English. But what I do here is not to kill time but to shorten it.'

Remedios gets used to seeing her come in with her mass of dishevelled black hair, dressed in a jumper, slacks and moccasins, shoes that permit her to minimise distances, since she always goes to and from the Calle Artes on foot.

'I think I've never taken a taxi from the day I came here, except with Renato. I adore the trams but he is less keen on them.'

'Who is Renato?'

'He is my reason for being in Mexico.'

'Did you prefer him to Max?'

'I don't know, I suppose I did, because I am sitting here with you rather than in New York.'

'Was that your decision?'

'I don't know if it was a decision or not. I think that I've never taken a decision in my life.'

'Of course you have. You decided to leave your parents.'

'Every child leaves their parents at some time or other. In my case, Remedios, things just happen to me.'

Side by side, Remedios and Leonora cut up pictures of boxers, horses, star fish, and strip out fashion or medical catalogues. Leonora sticks a shoe on top of a head and then recants: 'No, that looks too much like Dalí.' She chooses a tree that she surrounds with sardine tins, and cuts out a cat on which she sticks Marlene Dietrich's face, courtesy of *Harper's Bazaar*. She puts a tortoise on top of an aeroplane, and a staircase that drops down to a cauldron, out of which emerge two twins wearing uniform. Remedios sticks paper flowers on to a deep blue sea. They all laugh. Remedios' laughter always makes Leonora feel much better.

A Peruvian by the name of César Moro attends the parties held on Gabino Barreda. He is slim and small beneath his felt hat. He writes in French, the language he has adopted following nine years living in Paris in André Breton's shadow.

'I separated from him when he announced that the only valid manifestation of love is heterosexual.'

He still nostalgically recalls verses from his first notebook, which he gave to Eluard.

'He left it behind on a train.'

'Then write it over again.'

'I can't.'

‘Then kill Eluard. Did you also take part in the homage paid by the Surrealists to Violette Nozière, César?’ asks Remedios.

‘Yes indeed. She was sentenced for killing her father and for the attempt on her mother’s life.’

‘I would also like to kill Carrington.’

‘And if you do it, I promise I’ll write you a collection of poems.’

‘Breton dedicated a poem to la Nozière where he says that before her winged sex, like a flower in the catacombs, students and the elderly, priests and judges and lawyers all bend their knee, for every hierarchy ends in copulation.’

Xavier Villarrutia and the artist Agustín Lazo come to visit them at the invitation of César Moro, the co-founder with Emilio Westphalen of the magazine *El Uso de la Palabra.* Octavio Barreda is also interested in a magazine called *Dyn.* Paalen is an enthusiast of totemic art and wants to know all about art in Mexico before the Spanish Conquest. He argues heatedly about Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*, where he discusses animism, magic and the omnipotence of the thought processes of primitive people. Taboo is far more ancient than the gods of any religion. On the other hand, the Peruvian has no idea what Machu Picchu is, and has never bothered to go and take a look. He complains that no-one will publish him in France, still less in Lima, because his book would need to be translated.

‘Why ever do you write in French? What a curious way to complicate your life!’ Alice Rahon, his closest friend, comments.

Moro calls his continent ‘*Cretinoamérica*’. Paalen invites him to contribute to his magazine, *Dyn,* due to his admiration for his law suits with the Chilean poet, Vicente Huidobro.

‘Vicente is an imitator,’ Moro insists.

‘What is this all about *Dyn*?’ asks Leonora.

‘*Dynaton*, whatever is possible … Or have you already forgotten your Greek? *Dyn* is going to promote the art of Alaska, of the Maya, the Aztecs, and will re-evaluate the work of those painters for whom the Mexican muralists are an abomination.’

‘Who are they? There aren’t any, because the whole lot of them are immersed in that shit,’ Péret exclaims.

‘I came to know a very different young artist, along with his wife. The two of them paint in a very similar style. Their names are Rufino Tamayo and María Izquierdo,’ Paalen recalls.

Benjamin Péret is ill at ease in Mexico, he spends his whole life looking behind him. He is passionate about *El Libro de Chilam Balam*; reading the *Popol Vuh* excites him; he consults codices and manuscripts, but his mind is more on the capitulation of France to the Nazis than on the folk tales of the Quich’e Maya.

‘I write on them, even though my French never leaves me,’ he

laments.

'The hallucination I experienced in the caves of Altamira changed me forever, it is the most primitive people who have the most genius,' avers Paalen.

Each time a new road is opened, pre-Colombian artefacts come to light: all you need to do is follow the bulldozers in order to pick them up. Even in cemeteries, vases and pots turn up, they catch your eye like popcorn. Paalen enthuses over broken objects and the obsidian arrows buried around the pyramids of Teotihuacan.

'I cannot manage to understand how you can be so enthused. Mexico is such a horribly sad city,' alleges Péret. 'It is dead, without either cafés or bars.'

'And what about the famous tiled Sanborn's on Calle Madero?'

'What I mean are the pavement cafés that can bring everything to life, with tables out in the open air, where unexpected encounters happen, Nadja suddenly turns up and asks you for a light …'

Remedios is the only one of them who has work and she keeps prodding the rest to 'get moving'. Eva Sulzer, mistress of a vast fortune, financially maintains both Wolfgang Paalen and Alice Rahon.

'I make whatever it's necessary for me to turn my hand to: making posters and tickets, or designing clothes, decorating furniture and restoring the pre-Cortésian antiques that Paalen brings me,' boasts Remedios.

'And I shall give you some work on *Dyn*,' announces Paalen.

'Who will pay for that?'

'Eva.'

Eva Sulzer also buys their paintings from them.

A cemetery filled with prehispanic artefacts has been uncovered in Tlatilco, and Péret, so gloomy as a rule, grows enthused. What sophistication! What mystery! Some of the masks they find are astounding. It takes scant work to reconstruct the broken figurines and Remedios gets emotional when she manages to recapture the smile on a clay face.

The smallest jade bead is a gift from heaven in the hands of Benjamin Péret and Wolfgang Paalen.

'Well before the Christian era, the Maya were able to predict eclipses,' Miguel Covarrubias explains, who has also agreed to contribute to *Dyn*.

Paalen goes from the highest mood peaks to the deepest depressive abysses. Some days his wife, Alice Rahon, cannot get him to rise from his bed, even for meals. When he is asked what on earth he does all day long with the curtains and the door tightly closed, he answers: 'I stare at the ceiling.' So she asks Covarrubias to help her. 'El Chamaco' (the Kid) invites Paalen to Tabasco and drives him crazy

with delight showing him five Olmec heads he found in the archaeological terrain at La Venta.

'I have never seen anything possessed of such weight, expressiveness and essence!'

He returns to the capital in a state of exaltation, and writes — without stopping, in one fell swoop — an essay that gets published in the *Cahiers d'Art*.

The regular suppliers of both Paalen and Péret arrive with brown paper sacks which they open to reveal precious artefacts from Iztapalapa, Tenayuca, Teotihuacan and as far away as Xochicalco and Tula. Diego Rivera completes his private collection and Jean Charlot sketches and catalogues each and every figurine. Miguel Covarrubias is the most enthusiastic and generous of all. Kurt Stavenhagen's collection of popular culture is to be envied and Álvar Carrillo Gil, from the Yucatán, monopolises finds from the Maya peninsula. Péret has never dreamt that pre-Colombian art could be so much in demand. He writes to New York and Paris advertising the wares for sale, and receives one order after another by return of post.

'Mexicans are ignorant of the treasures they possess. This country has a head that needs examining.' Péret laughs each time a peasant comes to the door from Cholula or Cuicuilco and asks $2.50 for a treasure of incalculable value.

'One day they will come to their senses,' Paalen predicts, 'but for now we're well off, whereas later on we'll be dead.'

The market in such idols is centred on New York, Paris and Berlin. Remedios employs her seamstress' hands to restore them, and finds it incomprehensible that despite her best efforts Péret never has a *centavo* to his name.

'Go and ask Eva to pay you.'

'How lucky you are to have a Swiss woman, as well as all the Petits Suisses.'

'You can't get Petits Suisses in Mexico.'

'The white cheese from Chihuahua is similar, and it tastes just as good.'

'The hot chocolate is also good here.'

'Corn-on-the-cob soup is good too.'

'Popular art is also very good.'

'And *churros* — doughnuts — dipped in hot chocolate are delicious.'

The *aficionados* visit local churches and make off with armloads of crucifixes and colonial paintings, without anyone raising a murmur of protest. As to all the ex-votos covering so many sacristy walls, what more can one say about them?

Eva Sulzer has been captivated, even subjugated, by Mexico. The

Swiss millionaire quotes Dürer, who comes across pre-Colombian ceramics and jewellery for the first time when in Brussels and exclaims ‘All the days of my life I have seen nothing that rejoiced my heart so much as these things.’

In Texcoco, José Feher makes copies of the originals and they sell like hot cakes. His wife, Itza, keeps to European customs and force-feeds geese in order to turn their bloated livers into paté de foie-gras.

Leonora loves to climb to the top of the pyramid at Cuicuilco in the south of the city, because Gunther Gerzso — born to a Hungarian father and a German mother — knows about everything and informs her that at the centre of Cuicuilco there is a circular temple twenty metres high, from the top of which one can obtain an imposing view of the volcanoes.

‘Here is where thousands of people used to live until the Xitle volcano erupted and covered their farms in lava.’

He knows the whole history of Mexico and makes fun of the Big Three — the muralists Rivera, Siqueiros and Orozco — for painting hideous big monkeys.

‘I’ll get my hat and come along with you, Gunther,’ Leonora answers enthusiastically.

Looking down on the land from the summit, Gerzso records it on his canvas and then cuts it into slices: here the yellow corn, there the green alfalfa, and then suddenly he scratches the smooth surface with his pen-knife; he tells Leonora that Mexico is an unexpected revenge.

‘A betrayal.’

‘Yes, the Mexicans are also traitors.’

‘Sometimes, when we go on these walks, I have a sense of vertigo.’

‘We are all fragile.’

‘But not the spaces you paint. You used to resemble Tanguy but now you are more like yourself,’ affirms Leonora.

Gerzso carries on walking, notebook in hand.

‘At the end of the day, the landscape is your personality,’ Leonora repeats to him.

‘And what is yours?’

‘It belongs to the world of my childhood, the *sidhes*, the horses, the Celts.’

Benjamin Péret tells how the first sun was a jaguar who devoured everything; the second a great wind that likewise did away with the planet; the third drowned all the animals, so that not even reptiles survived; and so on up until the fifth sun, which transformed all Mexicans into the people of the sun, a chosen people. The old world has still not noticed what it means to be the people of the sun.

‘Leonora, I have one Huitzilopochtli too many. Don’t you want to

take it home?'

'He frightens me. These figures that so excite you appear malevolent to me. Just one of these devils could destroy me.'

'I have never seen anything more beautiful than Coatlicue,' Paalen enthuses again. 'She contains the whole primitive artistic genius.'

Leonora covers her eyes. 'What a nightmare!'

The Aztec goddess rises before her with her eagle's claws, a skull in place of a head and her skirt composed of snakes.

As far as Péret is concerned, Mexico should never have been conquered. Its past is far superior to whatever the pigs who vanquished it could possibly have devised.

On the Calle Gabino Barreda, they live as a family and play the Surrealist game they call 'exquisite corpses', involving both images and word-play. One person folds down the part of a sheet of paper on which they have written a word or drawn a picture, and others keep adding their contribution until all have done so and the finished text or image can be revealed. Remedios and Leonora also practise that other favourite of the Surrealists, 'automatic writing'.

'You have to start by first creating the sense of a vacuum within yourself, and then waiting. The drawing is born in your unconscious and its transferred expression on to the page is simply a physical movement, rhythm, incantation. It may resemble a scribble. You have already reached the preliminary stage, so now release and liberate your inhibitions on to your sheet of paper.'

Leonora returns home filled with enthusiasm. She has found her spiritual ambience, her true family; all that has landed in her lap she owes to Remedios.

Whether one likes it or not, the whole group goes back to Max. Péret remembers how insecure Max used to be, and how he felt himself drawn to people whom he regarded as living on the edge of what is called madness.

Mexico is the land of the future. André Breton wrote, two years earlier, that 'in him all hopes are burning …'

The group of friends quote Max at every opportunity and Leonora thinks of all she has lost.

39. MEMORIES OF THE INFERNO

IN THE HOUSE ON CALLE GABINO BARREDA, the topic of the day is France, above all because Péret still resides there, in spirit if not in body.

'Doesn't anything of what goes on here interest you?' Leonora asks him.

'To tell you the truth, Mexico is Pompeii to me and I am simply one more corpse.'

'Why Pompeii?'

'Because if Vesuvius did for Pompeii, Mexico is also buried in lava and …'

Péret does not finish his sentence and diverts into discussing his obsession: Nazism.

'How easy would it have been to assassinate Hitler before National Socialism spread as it has? Are Mexicans aware that they also admire Nazi-style discipline and applaud it during news bulletins?'

He keeps his distance from the muralists who, according to his point of view, celebrate violence. Péret knows enough about death to know that to die changes nothing.

'The Revolution? All it left behind was corpses, orphans and widows. Then the Big Three annihilated what was left. Nothing can exist apart from them. Their catch phrase "No other way but ours" — the title of Siqueiros' book on modern art in Mexico — is an ignominy,' Péret alleges.

'Herbert Read is right. Diego Rivera is a second-rate painter,' Esteban Francés concludes.

Yet the country of Mexico is hospitable, for it opens its doors to refugees.

José Horna can put anyone in a good mood. He made numerous maps for the Spanish Republicans and has now stuck a number of them up on the walls of his house. He seems handsome to Leonora, and he amuses her when he says:

'I always help anyone with anything, as long as they don't make me get up before eleven in the morning.'

Leonora is charmed by the way he speaks and calls him 'child'. Remedios translates Mexico for Leonora and teaches her how to pronounce Quetzalcoatl, Tecayehuatzin, Xicotencatl, Axayacatzin, cuetlaxochitl, and Leonora writes short stories populated by characters drawn from the covered markets on Jamaica and La Merced streets. The Sonora market is evil, for as well as plants and flowers, it sells herbs to bring about death or abortion, and women approach fearfully and ask for them in low voices. Bats hang on the stalls, their skulls

knocking against one another. To the swearwords Renato has already taught her, Leonora adds the riddles she collects on the street: 'A large ugly negress/who keeps her shape without recourse to food/she has everything but flesh/for the flesh am I/something I share with her./ What am I?' Both Leonora and Remedios are obsessed with the shadows of their characters.

'So, let's see if you can guess this other one: "I am a poor little negro/without arms or legs/I navigate over land and sea/and can hook even God himself." What am I?'

'The answer is the nail I have inside me called Max.'

Remedios introduces her to every type of edible insect starting with the caterpillars that live in the maguey and nopal cacti. She is familiar with them through recording them in such minute detail, and Leonora appreciates her gift as a miniaturist.

The pair of them are certain that nature heals, and that spells either offer cures for the soul or else precipitate it into the inferno, so it seems entirely normal to have recourse to herbalists and traditional healers.

'Sometimes I wish that my brains could be taken out, just to stop me thinking on and on about Santander,' Leonora tells her, and Remedios gives her a tea made with lemon balm, a recipe for oblivion.

Remedios knows how to barter.

'How much is it?'

'Fifteen.'

'Ten.'

The seller ends up giving it to her for whatever she offers. She is always called either 'little miss' or 'young girl', something which rejuvenates the two of them.

'Wouldn't you like this *burrito*, so well-trained and obliging?'

Leonora would happily buy a donkey a thousand times over, but Remedios interjects before she can:

'Not just yet. I need to check with my husband first.'

Leonora laughs aloud.

'Don't laugh. Benjamin knows how to do twenty thousand different things, and he still misses *Le Petit Parisien*.'

Walking about among so many warm and shy stallholders at once stimulates them.

Remedios reads widely and talks about Alexandre Dumas, Jules Verne, Edgar Allan Poe, Aldous Huxley and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

'Do you know what? I am writing a novel called *Lady Miracle*.'

She reads it aloud to Leonora, who has already published two books of short stories. The two of them undertake a 'cleansing' with the healer called Pachita, who brushes them from top to toe with *pirul* leaves, rue and lemon. Remedios brings her an egg and Leonora,

certain of her friend's perfection, is horrified when the black caterpillar of death emerges from the shell.

'Both you and Kati have changed my life in Mexico, Remedios. My anguish has vanished and I hardly suffer from those horrible recurrent memories any more.'

They put their friendship to simmer over a slow flame in a Celtic cauldron:

'We are the fox and the Little Prince. "It's the time that you spent on your rose that makes your rose so important",' Remedios, who knows *The Little Prince* by heart, assures her.

'What I like best about the book is the boa constrictor who swallowed the elephant,' Leonora replies.

'It is said that Saint-Exupéry was inspired to draw it by an island off Patagonia he saw from his plane.'

In the kitchen at her dilapidated flat on the Calle Gabino Barreda, they prepare delicious syrups and cordials. When they are together they have no need of anyone else. Remedios writes letters to imaginary psychiatrists, and Leonora laughs in surprise at her friend's ingenuity.

'I have just finished writing another letter to my psychiatrist, Justo Locatelli.'

Leonora confides in Kati over her horror at Renato's world: a world of politicians, bullfighters, journalists, drunkenness, riotous behaviour and bullets in the *cantina*…

'Yet Renato himself is not altogether abominable, is he?' Kati asks.

'No. He himself is a truly good man.'

The Englishwoman responds at once to the atmosphere in both Remedios' and Kati's houses. She is convinced that Remedios, their older sister, is in possession of an absolute truth, a secret that will change both their lives. When she bids them farewell she says: 'I am now going to put on my cape of bats,' and Remedios holds it out to her, or occasionally has cause to remind her: 'You have forgotten to put on your cape of bats!'

'What is your lucky number?'

'Number seven.'

'Mine is number eight,' Remedios smiles. 'Are you familiar with the law of octaves? Our vibrations coincide with one another.'

The two women artists read books on alchemy, a topic that has always fascinated Leonora, and read the tarot. They see in the arcana how their passions, desires and a common history are aligned.

'Do you know the tarot painted by Brauner, Herold, Max, Masson and Lam? The arcana are Paracelsus, Hegel, Lamiel, Novalis, Freud, Baudelaire, Alicia, Ubu, Lautréamont, Helen Smith and Pancho Villa.'

Leonora paints to suit herself, and Remedios illustrates catalogues for the Bayer drugs company. If she and Remedios ever fall out, Kati is always on hand to be their conciliator.

On the street corner, the street-sellers set out their herbs, chameleons, sea shells and little packages labelled 'sexual debility', 'arthritis', 'bile', 'indigestion', 'eye strain', all greatly in demand by healers, spiritualists, bone doctors, all of whom know so much more than doctors. Remedios prefers taking a fennel tea to taking a pill. In Mexico miracles, just like idols, appear from under every stone. Each time a site is excavated, urns and masks materialise which Hernán Cortés and his army attempted to destroy and which today are regarded as treasures.

'What is this?' Leonora asks in surprise.

'It is a jade mask. Jade was especially highly valued, a sacred stone *par excellence,*' Péret answers.

'It is not the only stone of its kind,' Wolfgang Paalen adds, 'there's also the *chalchihuitl*, a word that means "precious stone that illuminates", and it is round and brilliant. The Olmecs placed it inside the mouths of the dead to light up their path into the underworld. The Chinese, too, used to carve jade cigars to place between the lips of their dead.'

That the earth can at any moment expel the remains of an extraordinary culture moves Leonora. In contrast, Mexican religiosity astounds her: they cross themselves with the first coin of the day they receive, drink moonshine at the foot of the altar and cut or lash themselves until they bleed on Good Friday. On even the smallest village square stands a church that swallows up any passers-by. On the second of November, All Souls Day, Remedios buys Leonora a sugar skull with her name iced on the forehead; except that she had to add the final 'a' with a pen, because he could only find one reading *Leonor.*

'That's what Doctor Morales used to call me when I was in Santander.'

As soon as Renato departs to his newspaper office, Leonora rushes round to the Calle Gabino Barreda. She had already met Remedios in Paris with Esteban Francés, her husband at the time, and before then when she used to live with Gerardo Lizarraga. Now she is with Benjamin Péret.

'In Paris, I found the group of Surrealists so intimidating; it was why I hardly ever went near the Café de Flore,' explains Remedios, who encourages Leonora to play all kinds of Surrealist games.

Ever since she left the clinic in Santander, Leonora has learnt to keep herself at a distance, but Remedios succeeds in piercing her armour. Scarcely does she set foot in the flat before her sense of security is restored. Remedios supports her, protects her, comprehends

her. She has never had such a close friend.

'I only really feel good when I am with you. It's a huge relief.'

'How good that Doctor Mabille came to Mexico! He has been asking after you and hopes to see you,' Alice Rahon relays to her.

To his great friend André Breton, the French doctor is an exceptional Surrealist. He seems to wear his white coat even outside his consulting rooms. His essay on the importance of the mirror in human psychology was published in the magazine *Minotaur* and caused a big commotion inside the group. In it, he maintained that man recognises his 'I' in his mirror image. Reading *The Oval Lady* while he was in Paris inspired him to write that Leonora was a marvellous personality and that ever since she had set foot inside the Rue Fontaine looking 'slim, with her dark hair, heavy eyebrows, eyes burning with a unique fire', she dazzled him. 'She reminds me of those legendary Scottish princesses, beings of immense lightness who escape across medieval castle roofs to gallop off on wild white horses, only in order to vanish around a bend in the track over the moor …'

Leonora had not been pleased to find Mabille confusing the Irish with the Scottish and the English, but the Surrealist doctor's poetic strength and good looks persuade her to confide in him.

'Pierre, I am an addict,' and Leonora embraces him.

'Don't you think that what you do is to let your emotions go up in smoke? If you're able to paint with a cigarette in your hand, you are bound to be able to write about whatever happened to you in Santander.'

'No, Pierre, I can't. I wrote it all down once in New York, but I don't want to go back to talking about it any more.'

'If you don't express it in words, your body is liable to explode. The whole world is possessed by madness. Where I've just come from, in Haiti, Voodoo is a liberation. It seems as if insanity is the norm there. In the north of Mexico, the *Rarámuri* have ceremonies that go back thousands of years, and their dances create catharsis. It makes no difference that if their interminably repeated dance steps appear meaningless to the casually curious passer-by, they have a function in ridding them of any torment.'

'Would you like me to dance?'

'I would like you to write down your experiences in Santander, and I'll help you. What has happened to you happens to many more than just you. You have no monopoly on insanity.'

'That was all three years ago. It's impossible to live through it all again.'

'In order to forget, it is necessary first to remember. What was published in the magazine *VVV* when you were in New York is barely more than a sketch. Don't be such a narcissist, or you'll turn into a

new little Saint Thérèse. The virgin from whose mouth roses issue is such a commonplace in the magical thought patterns of the people, just like tears that fall as pearls and drops of blood as rubies. But the story of a woman who returns from hell — the inferno — and can tell us about it is a gift to both psychoanalysis and to philosophy.'

'I'm afraid.'

'You are afraid of society. Forget all about that, it only gets in the way of artistic development.'

In August 1943, Leonora descends into the inferno and writes a 100-page draft called *Memories of Down Below*, with assistance from Jeanne, Pierre's wife.

'I don't know if I'll be able to express the horror of that period; what I can assure you of is that I wrote it in a trance and suffered the agonies of a Prometheus.'

Pierre Mabille tells her he should be back a few days later, and when he next sees her, he embraces her with emotion:

'You are a visionary, your book reads like a treatise on suffering.'

Leonora shows him the page on which she drew Doctor Luis Morales' portrait, along with the map of the asylum with its railings, fortress, apple orchard and chained dogs, and signs she deems to be alchemical symbols, a horse on its knees — 'Can that be me, Pierre?' — and a coffin containing a body with two heads.

Mabille's pronouncement is definitive:

'They should never have injected you with Cardiazol, Leonora.'

40. THE HUNGARIAN PHOTOGRAPHER

IN THE EVENING, LEONORA greets Renato with the customary reproach: 'You spend the whole day long at the newspaper.'

'And you clearly take my advice to heart, since there is not a single new brushstroke on your canvas.'

'What an arsehole *pendejo* you are. So now you've become an art critic?'

'How good you've become at throwing insults in Spanish!' Renato replies, in mock wonder.

'I feel that I loathe you; you've no idea how much I loathe you, and I dislike doing so. I am deeply disgusted with myself for my terror of being alone, and I loathe myself for that, too.'

Renato slams the door, and departs muttering: 'You're crazy.' Leonora is flooded with resentment.

'I'm leaving,' she manages to shriek after him.

Elsie receives her with open arms at her house on Durango Street.

'Of course you can stay here with me.'

In the house on Calle Gabino Barreda, the last things they want to hear about are fights, weapons, revolution. They can't bear to hear descriptions of any form of cruelty, and Elsie provides Leonora with renewed strength, thanks to her sound judgement. The garden surrounding her house is temperate; it calms Leonora's nerves.

Elsie at once invites her out to brunch: 'Come on Leonora, at noon we'll go to the Casa de los Azulejos and eat scrambled eggs. Then you'll see how well you sleep here tonight.'

The next morning at breakfast Leonora announces:

'I'm going back to Renato.'

'Why?'

'Because I don't know how to sleep alone.'

'Yesterday you wanted to leave him for good.'

'And today I don't. I want to catch him before he leaves home to go to the newspaper office.'

When she appears at the flat on the Calle de Artes, Renato is still in the shower, and she calls out as if nothing had happened:

'Renato, Remedios and Benjamin have invited us to dinner.'

'Fine, I'll stop by and pick you up at eight o'clock.'

'You are hopelessly unpunctual and it drives me to distraction.'

It is past nine o'clock, and Renato still hasn't arrived. So Leonora decides to take her pets Pete, Dicky and Daisy with her to the home of her friends. Kitty is fine on her own, since she spends most of the time asleep. Three hours later, Renato gets there to find Leonora chatting with a Hungarian photographer who has just arrived in the country.

His name is Imre Emerico Weisz, known as Csiki, converted to Chiki thanks to the Mexican way of turning *cs* into *ch*.

'He was in a concentration camp where he nearly died and where his brother was killed. Robert Capa introduced him to me in Madrid,' Kati informs her.

Renato and Benjamin Péret were recounting their experiences in the cabaret known as *La Cabana Cubana*, where sensational black women performed all kinds of dances. 'I took Picasso there, and it was a huge success.'

The Hungarian is handsome, he has red eyes, and describes his flight from Europe with a mathematical precision which Leonora finds emotionally moving.

All of a sudden, for no better reason than their shared reminiscences of the war, the two find themselves apart from the rest, outside the bubble of the ongoing party. The further Chiki gets into his story, the more sharply Leonora finds she has to draw in her breath.

'Do you know the day when the course of Imre Emerico Weisz's life was decided?' Chiki asks her.

'No, when?' Leonora responds flirtatiously, half-anticipating a reply along the lines of 'the day when I first met you', but his look grows darker as he explains: 'The day my mother handed me over to the orphanage.'

'Whenever was that?'

'When I was four years old. She had three children and one had to be picked out. That one was me.'

Leonora pictures the scene of the sleeping child whose mother pulls him from the bed to dress and then bring him to a big building in front of which there's a line of many mothers with their children. Chiki disappears behind the high railings, they shave his head and, as he is the smallest one there, a prefect dresses him in striped trousers and buttons his jacket, which has the number 105 sewn on the breast pocket.

'Go outside again and give your mother back the clothes she brought you in.'

His mother kneels down in front of him, and tells him that he is going to learn all sorts of useful things.

Chiki bursts into tears. His mother wipes his nose with a hanky: 'From now on into the future, you will need to blow your own nose.'

'Why did you bring me here?'

'Because you were the chosen one. You should be as proud as when Abraham picked Isaac. You too are a Jew and don't you ever forget it.'

She turns on her heel and Chiki runs after her, but his new button

boots cause him to fall flat on his face.

It no longer matters to him that a hundred and fifty children can see him cry.

From that moment on, Chiki cries every single night and wakes up all the other children. 'Number 105 *again*!' they chorus. Then they go back to sleep, while only Chiki remains awake.

It is incomprehensible to Leonora that a person can be turned into a number.

As she, too, has suffered so much from insomnia, Leonora identifies with Chiki when he tells her that 'the moon shone on the linoleum floor of the dormitory, transforming its gleam into the waters of the Danube, and my bed became a boat set on its course home to Budapest'.

'The first time I tried to dry out my sheet the prefect found the stain, and so all was revealed. "What a pretty sight, number 105!" he said, pulling back the covers for all to see.'

'What horribly cruel people, how could you put up with such humiliation?' Leonora is not really asking Chiki so much as herself, recalling the image of how she was left to lie in her own excrement back at the asylum.

'At least I found consolation in mathematics, and each time a teacher called me up to the blackboard, I would surprise him with my ability. One day I even turned the history of my country into an equation.'

'How did you do that?'

'The master asked me to describe the coronation of Szent István of Hungary, and I drew a mathematical diagram. The headmaster came in and announced in tones of great solemnity: "Imre Emerico Weisz seems to have confused the coronation of Szent István with higher mathematical calculations." Then he ordered me to follow him into his office.'

'… And gave you the ticking-off of your life?'

'No, he drew a different diagram on the blackboard and asked me if I knew what it was. "It's a drawing that looks like the one I drew in our history class," I answered. He asked me where I had learnt to draw like this and I told him I didn't know. From that time onwards, the school masters started to treat me better.'

Leonora was touched by Chiki's story, for she had never known a child could suffer so much. She was Alice in Wonderland in comparison with Chiki. She had talked to horses, the *sidhes* had taken care of her, the Red Queen protected her; none of this could come anywhere near his mathematical equations devised by a superior mind.

Chiki tells her how he fell in love with a little girl 'whose

heightened pink complexion was the colour of the *krumplicukor* we got to eat on special occasions'. His whole body trembled, a strange colour rose to his cheeks, and learning that the girl had power over animals caused him to forget his nightmares.

By way of repaying his trust in her, Leonora recounted the story of her First Holy Communion to him. As a treat, her mother took her to Blackpool Zoo. Just the two of them together. She still had on her white First Communion dress and the monkeys came up to the bars of their cage in order to greet her. What a fiesta! And just the two of them alone! Without either her father, or her brothers, or Nanny. 'Mr. Lion, allow me to introduce myself, I am Leonora Carrington, and you fill me with admiration.' 'Miss Hyena, even though you smell revolting, I would rather have you than Mlle. Varenne as my French teacher.' 'Mr. Lynx, what a pleasure to meet you, please invite me to run at your side.' 'Sir Elephant, how well you wash your ears under the shower of your trunk.'

'The elephant never forgets,' her mother told her, and was also surprised to note: 'The animals approach you, Prim, look how they come up to the bars of their cages.'

'That is as it should be. They know I speak their language.'

Her paintings are a bestiary. Horses, rabbits, tortoises, hyenas, foxes, sheep. Every time she turns a page, the zebras' stripes imprint themselves on her brain. Only the crocodile fails to attract her, because it crawls on its belly and has too many teeth.

Earlier on in her life, in the garden at Crookhey Hall, she used to talk to the plants: 'Hello rose bush, what's going on with you? Open your buds, and don't be so lazy.' She pictured how it would look when she returned to see it next time. 'Nothing is ever how you imagine it.'

Leonora is pained by the story of Chiki's childhood. Perhaps she could paint the scene and so unravel the account of the apples stolen on the banks of the Danube.

'The owner of that orchard must be rich and must certainly have a large family in order to eat so much fruit,' number 99 advises number 105.

'No doubt he has six wives and then ten children with each.'

'Not at all. Those apples are going to feed the pigs,' replies number 99 with conviction.

That night, numbers 19, 60, 38, 105, 68, 85, 27, 99 and 55, and called, respectively, András, Szabó, Mirko, Emerico, Antal, Nikola, Sándor, Ferenc and János, leave their dormitory through an open window. The moon helps them to find their way. They separate at the orchard, pick the fruit and, once inside the latrine, share out the booty.

'To tell you the truth, I wasn't that bothered about the fruit,'

Chiki confides in Leonora. ‘Even today I can best remember the taste of freedom in the middle of that night. Then, all of a sudden, I heard a noise and a small white horse pranced up to us, capering in circles.’

‘Was it a fiery steed?’ asks Leonora in astonishment.

There could be no doubt about it. Chiki was her twin soul, advancing towards her borne aloft in the branches of an apple tree.

Leonora never had to eat the dry unleavened bread that fell to Chiki’s lot; her convent school was only for the daughters of the very rich.

‘What does your mother do, Leonora?’

‘Nothing. She gives orders, goes horse-riding, pours tea, takes trips, pays calls and organises charity auctions. What about yours?’

‘She was always sewing from first light. I used to go red with hatred because I was forbidden to interrupt her. She had no time for us children, her whole life was consumed by the tac-tac-tac of the sewing machine.’

‘What about your father, Chiki?’

‘He lies dead beneath the snows of Poland. And yours?’

‘Mine is an ogre. I still dream that he is pursuing me.’

‘Do you know what, Leonora? In my recurrent nightmares, there’s always the sound of a sewing machine in the background, and sometimes I dream that eight white-faced priests are moving the treadle and pushing the buttons in order to stitch me. I defend myself shouting: “I am number 105!” and then I always wake up bathed in sweat.’

‘I also often dream of nuns and priests as well as the wild boar, hare and duck on the great dining-room table over which Carrington is presiding.’

She holds out a stone to Chiki: ‘Our father is the water, our mother the earth, and we shall live in the same house, for the fire is my element as the air is yours. You can open the door to it with this pointed stone.’ Leonora offers it to him. ‘From now and ever onwards, you are me and I am you.’

Chiki perceives respect in the way in which Leonora looks at him.

‘I still live in the orphanage along with other starving children. That is the door I need to open. I am a Jew, Leonora; to exist as a Jew is a deep cry that resounds through the night.’

‘He knows much more than I do; he is a superior man,’ Leonora thinks to herself with emotion. Kati confirms as much. Chiki comes from a developed country, and was used to moving in intellectual circles in Budapest. ‘His sister married the University rector, and he was able to save her from the concentration camp. Now he, too, is in Mexico, he is an academic and spends all his days in the library.’

The photographer finds Leonora just as pleasing.

‘Do you know who Robert Capa is?’

‘Yes I do. He is a great war correspondent. I’ve seen his photographs in magazines.’

‘Capa is my friend. I worked with him when we were young. In Budapest we used to call him “Bandi”. We were both anti-fascist Jews, and our names were Csiki and Bandi. We escaped from Hungary, each of us with a camera slung over our shoulder, and managed to get to Paris. There was nothing for us back home, it was either jail or death.

‘I was told to look for lodgings in the Latin Quarter,’ Chiki went on. ‘Do you know the Hôtel Lhomond, between the Panthéon and the Rue Mouffetard? I didn’t have a sou and Bandi paid for our first couple of nights there. “If we find ourselves dying of hunger, we can always steal a baguette.” “I suggest we go fishing in the Seine.” “No, Csiki, there’s nothing to fish in the Seine. Not to mention that neither of us know how to catch fish.” “It’s just a matter of patience.”

‘We managed to pull out two tiny fishes that tasted of mud. On the third night, we moved into one of those studios of the Rue Froidevaux, already crammed with Hungarians. With a baguette and several boxes of cigarettes, we managed to survive starvation. Bandi was sure that bread was most filling, but I continued eating the *pommes frites.*’

Leonora drinks in his words. Chiki seduces her, transporting her back to Paris, offering her recipes for survival.

‘Esdras Biro, a Hungarian, recommended eating potato peelings. They taste better than tobacco and are good for calming one’s nerves, he told us.’

‘I adore eating potato skins,’ Leonora smiles broadly.

‘We were not only young, but also idealists. Bandi dreamt of buying himself a 35mm Leica. In Hungary, Lasjos Kassak had taught us how to take photos and told us: “Through your lens you can observe social injustice on a grand scale.” Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine found all the pain in the world within range of their camera.

‘Bandi always had plenty of self-confidence while I am introverted and insecure. Women always clustered around him, whereas I was always paralysed with shyness in their company. At night, Bandi snored as loud as a rasping sawmill while it always took me hours to get off to sleep. He would reproach me with: “Csiki, don’t always walk so close behind me, it makes you seem like my pet dog.” I think he believed I lacked character; the truth was that I lacked the self-assurance he enjoyed in such abundance. He often went out alone. One day he came back fired with enthusiasm from meeting up with a Polish photographer, Dawid Szymin, later to become known as “Chim” Seymour, and told me: “I had a conversation with the most intelligent and amusing man I’ve met in a long time. He has an unusually

piercing look in his eyes, half-hidden by some thick glasses. He has invited me out to eat and I asked him if you might come along too." To the horror of both of the others, instead of ordering a proper meal, I ordered bog-standard French fries, lifting them to my lips one at a time with my fingers, while the two of them became increasingly impassioned in their conversation with one another. From that moment on, I felt replaced. "Now I have found a truly stimulating companion!" Bandi announced.'

Leonora found it flattering to become Chiki's confidante. 'How well he can express his emotions!'

'Bandi and Chim joined forces with a slim young man with a tall forehead. His name was Henri Cartier-Bresson. The trio would meet up at the Dôme in Montparnasse. "You want to come along?" Bandi used to ask. And I always refused. Eating alone is hateful. "Why isn't your friend here too, that one who goes everywhere with you?" the café owner used to ask me, a woman so friendly that I could so easily have fallen in love with her.'

Before Leonora had time to ask him whether he had become involved with this café owner, Chiki continued:

'The worst possible thing that could happen did so when his German girlfriend, Gerta Pohorylle, first appeared. Bandi dedicated every night to being with her. "What became of your friend, the one with the velvet eyes?" the café owner asked me and I felt even more lonely. Esdras Biro, who was a wise Hungarian, advised me that: "Csiki, you need to find yourself a woman who can help you put on the calories. Your friend and his lover only leave their bed when they need either to eat or to urinate."'

Leonora found the words 'to urinate' as objectionable in French as in Spanish.

'One afternoon, Bandi announced: "From today onwards, I am Robert Capa and Gerta is Gerda Taro. We are an American photographer with two heads, one male and one female, a triumphant man of the world. This formula is guaranteed to open a great many doors for us. The first thing I need to do is to get rid of this leather jacket. The second is to go to the hairdresser. Do what I'm doing, change your name and shake the moths from your clothes."'

'Did you change your name?' asked Leonora.

'No, I kept mine. My mother's words still echoed in my ears: "You too are a Jew, and don't you ever forget it." For a Jew, to change your name is to alter your essence, and something in you dies. Sarai becomes Sara; Saul turns into Paul; and I want to go on being Imre Emerico Weisz until I draw my last breath. The irony,' and he smiled, 'is that throughout my childhood I was a number in Hungary and in Mexico they call me Chiki, a nickname that belittles me.'

Leonora feels how much she admires him, without the least shred of doubt.

'On 18th July 1936 the Spanish Civil War erupted. The whole land seemed transformed, a secular State was about to take over, there would be work for all and the orphanages where children became numbers would be shut down. "We're off to Spain with Chim," Capa told me. Walking up the Gran Vía in Madrid something incredible happened to Capa: he bumped into Kati, his childhood friend, the love of his whole life, and he threw himself at her: "Kati, Katherine Deutsch!" He lifted her up in his arms, and squeezed her so tightly that she nearly succeeded in fighting him off. "Why do you always think that just because you're handsome, everything is permitted you?" "What are you doing here?" "I'm working for the magazines *Umbral* and *Tierra y Libertad*. I was at the Aragon Front and have been sent on here." "Csiki, let me introduce you to Kati Deutsch, whom I have fancied madly ever since I was fifteen years old. She escaped me following the burning of the Reichstag, since it was she who lit the match. So, as you can see, this woman is a menace,"' Chiki explains to Leonora.

'Capa, Taro and Chim all went to the Front. Kati stayed behind and caught images of suffering that the rest of the photo-journalists missed. While they rushed about, she took an image of a woman standing up as she breastfed her child in the midst of the rubble of ruined buildings, and made a series on newborn babies lined up on a kitchen table. It was three days before Capa registered that there was nobody there he could trust to develop his films, and he asked me to go back to Paris. "There you are indispensable, whereas here there's a whole crowd of us."'

'So Chiki, the truth is you hardly know Spain at all,' Leonora comments.

'No, I don't. What I asked Bandi — now Capa — was to be able to say goodbye to Kati, and have the chance to tell her that her photos were excellent. "Take care of yourself, and we'll meet up again. Do you know what, Kati? Thanks to your pictures, I feel myself drawing closer to your fellow anarchists." And she asked me: "What about Gerda Taro? Bandi is a seducer and women always fall at his feet. His mother told me that even when he was a baby he was always grinning at young women."

'So in the end, Capa, Taro and Chim Seymour, as well as Maurice Oshron, all sent their copy back from Spain to Paris, and I would print it up in a darkroom, and archive all the negatives. Capa's photos got mixed up with Gerda's; Chim's with Maurice Oshron's. Yet the bye-line was always Capa's and, in those days, the bye-line was the last thing anyone ever thought about. Anyone could die in the blink of an

eye, or a click of the shutter.

'There were two more photo magazines as well as *Vu* and they were called *Regardes* and *Voilà.* This multiplied our outlets — and the amount of work involved. I had never sought to stand out. On the contrary, I had learnt that the best way of surviving was to keep well away from the winners. I kept all 127 rolls of negatives in small compartments inside three cardboard boxes with little niches inside, like a honeycomb. Each one was marked with a sticky label giving the place, date and subject. There must have been well over three thousand negs that I guarded like the apple of my eye.'

Leonora considers how Csiki's capacity for devotion has no limits.

'Ripped apart by a Republican tank, Gerda Taro died at Brunete, her sole weapon the camera over her shoulder. Robert Capa never stopped blaming himself: "It should have been me who died." I just carried on developing, printing, archiving, hoarding, and I thought about Kati, so small, there all alone — or perhaps not so very alone — for a twenty-year-old woman can make men turn and stare, and all the more so when they feel surrounded by death. Inside his rolls of negatives, Capa hid the message: "Things are going really badly."'

'It's unbelievable that you have lived through so much!' Leonora cries out in distress.

'You know the rest, Leonora. The Republicans lost the war, and the chaos at the end of it all was terrifying. Chim Seymour caught a ship out to Mexico, he came out aboard the *Sinaia*. And Esdras Biro, despite his advanced years, was thrown into prison. The day that Capa left for New York, I took a train down to Marseilles, with all the negatives in my suitcase. "If I can't save myself, at least I can preserve the evidence that we put up a fight." Once at Marseilles, I handed over the case to Francisco Aguilar González, a Mexican diplomat. "Your country is the only one to support us Republicans," I insisted. Soon afterwards, still in Marseilles, the French Vichy regime deported me to a concentration camp.

'At Casablanca I set sail for Mexico on board the Portuguese ship *Serpa Pinto*, the same one that Remedios and Benjamin went out on. I had no passport, no money, and from Veracruz I travelled on to Mexico City by train only because a Spaniard bought me a ticket.'

Chiki sits there in silence.

'Good. Well, I think that's all.'

Leonora looks at him in admiration: Chiki is a Stoic. To place her trust in him seems the most natural thing in the world. How utterly different to her, fleeing Lisbon on the arm of a handsome diplomat! Her situation was vastly privileged compared to his. His simplicity overwhelms her. She looks at him as if he were a mythic character. A man of that degree of integrity is what she needs, a man with the

same European roots as her, someone who has suffered as she has.

'On top of all that, he's good-looking,' Kati tells her with a smile.

Leonora exaggerates everything she says about him, inventing her own version of Chiki.

When Renato tells her it is now time to leave the party, Leonora returns as if from another world, and Remedios notices the gleam in her eye. It's possible that Renato too might have noticed it. From that first conversation onwards, every night before she falls asleep, Leonora sees the Hungarian's face before her eyes, and his voice echoes deep inside her head.

41. OF NEEDLES AND THREAD

IN MEXICO, LEONORA GOES ABOUT UNNOTICED, even more so now she is at Chiki's side. Nobody had turned a hair on the busy streets of New York either; here, when they see her, they lower their gaze. They might even timorously step aside.

Her new suitor collects her from the Calle Artes and, since neither of them have any money, they go out walking together with the dogs, something that Renato would never do. Tall, slender and with a large nose, Chiki's wide smile never fails to comfort her. He must be the most attentive man on earth.

There is something inherently defenceless and modest about the way he looks. Just like the Mexicans they pass in the street, it seems as if he's apologising for his very existence. Leonora forgets all about the straw hat she bought on the market to protect her face from the glare and confronts the sun, extending her arms as she does so. 'It won't matter. When I was a girl in the convent school, I stopped the sun in its tracks, and today I'll do it again.' They talk in French, or walk on in silence down the Avenida Álvaro Obregón, which seems to them the most Parisian of all the avenues in Mexico City. Leonora issues orders: 'Stop'; 'Go'; 'Good boy'; 'Good girl' and the dogs look back over their shoulders at her in gratitude. The photographer Semo had given Chiki a camera, which he now wears slung around his neck.

He learns Spanish faster than Leonora, because students and young lovers ambling along the avenues keep stopping and asking him: 'Please can you take our photo?' or 'Where do you come from?' before pausing to chat with him.

Since almost no-one can speak Czech, Polish, Hungarian or Russian, Slavs are bound to have to learn new languages, and within three months Chiki can make himself understood considerably better than Leonora.

Meeting up with him in the afternoons makes life more bearable. Plus there is the fact that Chiki regards her with something approaching veneration.

Leonora is no longer affected by the whirlpool of appointments and excursions revolving around Renato. The less she sees of him, the better off she is.

'I would love to fly through the window mounted on a white horse.'

'So now you have found yourself a Hungarian mount, haven't you?'

'Yes. I have more in common with him than I do with you.'

'And is that lowlife going to help you to paint?'

‘I don’t know.’

‘The only things that struck me about him are his bloodshot eyes and his equally red nose.’

‘He knows André Breton.’

‘Well fancy that! Some recommendation!’

‘He has suffered enormously.’

‘That’s no kind of reason to get married.’

‘I have suffered a lot myself.’

‘Oh no, now you’re becoming a pain in the balls, it’s high time you stopped repeating that same tired old story.’

‘I don’t want to live with you any more.’

‘As far as I know, this is the only floor you have to sleep on.’

‘I’ve already spoken to Elsie Escobedo and she has invited me to stay at her house.’

‘You’re crazy! Where on earth are you going to leave your animals?’

‘I shall take them with me.’

‘Leonora, I can’t leave my job or we’d both die of hunger, you need to pull your weight.’

‘Yes, I shall pull my weight by getting myself out of here!’

Renato goes out, slamming the door as he does so, and Leonora packs up her case, her dogs and her cat, and Don Mazarino’s cage, closing the door behind her. It is over now, for certain. The only creature she leaves behind is Pete, for she intuits that Renato loves him, so as she leaves, she bids him farewell saying: ‘You belong here in this house.’

‘If only there were enough space here in the Gabino Barreda, I’d invite you to stay. But there’s scarcely enough room even for me and Benjamin,’ Remedios Varo tells her. ‘You can leave Kitty here with the rest of my cats, if you like’.

‘I’ll still come to visit Gabino Barreda.’

Elsie shows her to her room in the house on the Calle Durango. ‘Here in this house we all love you.’

That afternoon, Leonora sews a wardrobe of clothes for José Horna’s puppets. One night she slip-stitches a white hospital overall, and can be heard talking aloud in Dr. Luis Morales’ voice.

She runs into the master bedroom, and arrives screaming at the bed of the sleeping Elsie and Manuel Escobedo.

‘Please stop shaking and crying, Manuel has to get up early for work tomorrow morning.’

‘May I light up a cigarette?’

‘Not in bed, no,’ Manuel Escobedo answers, increasingly annoyed.

The next night, Leonora again appears in the doorway, then jumps on top of the wardrobe.

‘Down the corridor, in my room, Dr. Luis Morales is there with a syringe filled with Cardiazol in his hand ready to inject me!’

Elsie calms her down, and Manuel Escobedo gets used to finding cigarette butts throughout the house, not to mention the nocturnal visits that interrupt his night’s sleep.

‘Leonora, it would be a good move for you to visit a psychoanalyst,’ Elsie advises.

‘Is that very expensive?’

‘It can be worth every *centavo*.’

‘I have my very own psychoanalyst inside me, and can hear their voice night and day.’

‘It doesn’t seem like it’s having that good an effect. We had better go and look for another. In the meantime, rather than listen to that maddening voice, start reading again. Or are you unable to read at the moment?’

‘Yes, I can from time to time. But I feel there’s a crowd of people inside me, I’m not just a single person. My whole body is like a radio, it receives and emits messages. Certain frequencies just don’t get through. No doubt the mad voice only hears one radio wave.’

‘What you most need is to get out of yourself and find a job to do. Let’s think about it: we all have our own responsibilities in this house. The dogs are barking in the garden, and the bird is singing in its cage.’

Leonora is drawn to the old-fashioned English that Miguel speaks. He is the sixteen-year-old son of the Escobedo household, and he follows her from the living to the dining room to interrogate her.

Leonora assures him: ‘I am your psychiatrist.’

‘Since brevity is the soul of wit. And tediousness, the limbs and outward flourishes, I will be brief. You are mad, good madam,’ Miguel answers, paraphrasing *Hamlet*.

The Ojo Caliente, country ranch of the Escobedo family, is an oasis. Catherine Yarrow also paints. She decides to do the portrait of a stable lad, whom she orders to strip naked in the yard. He takes offence. Manuel’s mother starts wailing to the heavens on high.

‘The creative initiatives assumed by your compatriots know no limits, it would seem,’ Manuel tells Elsie.

‘Indeed. We live in a Golden Age and we shall put on *The Madwoman of Chaillot* by Jean Giraudoux.’

‘And who will play the Madwoman?’

‘I shall. Leonora is creating a hat for me with a swan on top, and is designing a wardrobe of new costumes for Remedios to run up, because she’s the only one of us with a sewing machine. She is the most phenomenal fashion designer!’

Elsie invites Leonora to Acapulco, to what at the time is the only hotel on the bay: it’s called *El Papagayo*, meaning the Parrot. Leonora

reads stretched out on the sand in front of the hotel. Her head of black curly hair is seen as a challenge, and the holiday-makers turn and stare. ‘Look, a real mermaid.’ Among those who come up to her is an Englishman called Edward James, who finds her stiff and haughty. She is, however, distinguished by her ingenuity, wit, and her critical sensibility. Elsie is equally sharp and makes fun of the British stiff upper lip. Leonora responds with lofty superiority, and when conversation is resumed she takes herself off alone to read. Whenever anyone asks her something, she replies in monosyllables.

‘You should take a look at her paintings,’ Elsie advises Edward.

‘This arrogant Englishwoman can paint?’

‘Yes, and very well too.’

At lunch time, Edward James sits down next to Leonora, and Miguel Escobedo asks Edward about his collection.

‘I don’t have a collection. I’ve just bought up pictures painted by young unknown artists. Some of them have become famous, but what they needed at the time when I bought their work was financial and moral breathing space.’

Leonora takes note of the fact that, along with sharing a nationality, they have in common the habits of their privileged social class.

Elsie’s personality gives Leonora back her adolescence. She is a woman of character, cast in the same mould as Ursula Goldfinger, Stella Snead and Catherine Yarrow. In other words, they form a group of women who know what to do with their lives. Sometimes Leonora irritates Elsie, and then Catherine takes her off, an echo of her indomitable behaviour when she rescued Leonora during the war.

‘I have the soul of a psychoanalyst, and I know how to manage any kind of a situation. I calmed her down in St. Martin d’Ardèche; and again in Madrid; so I can help to stabilise her in Mexico.’

At the end of her first therapy session, Catherine tells Elsie:

‘Leonora is leaving Renato. Chiki, who has been living in a shed at the bottom of the garden belonging to that anarchist Ricardo Mestre, has found a flat for them.’

Elsie is worried. ‘Do you think that Weisz can manage a woman with such a temperament and so much talent?’

‘There’s no other option any more. Leonora is pregnant.’

That night, Leonora herself goes up to Elsie: ‘I am going to have a baby.’

‘Don’t worry, it will do you good. I know: I’ve got two.’

42. THE LOVE THAT MOVES THE SUN

'YOU LOOK VERY PRETTY now you're pregnant …'

Remedios is smiling at her.

Leonora has no idea about any of this. Any more than Chiki, and the two of them are looking at each other in perplexity.

'I hadn't thought of having a child.'

'Well, now you're going to have one. What do you prefer, a boy or a girl?' Kati asks.

'I would prefer to paint one. What kind of a thing is a child? How does it happen?'

'You were once a child, weren't you?'

'No, I was a filly, then a yearling, and now I am a mare.'

'You look more like a cow at present!' says Remedios, laughing out loud.

'The postman brought me a letter from my mother. I really hope she'll come to Mexico as I haven't a *centavo* left. Do you think she'll come, Kati?'

'You told me yourself that she's keen to see you.'

They set up home in a flat at number 174 on the Avenida Obregón. Leonora loves this avenue; the street lamps along it have been imported from Paris and light up her memories.

With so little understanding of their situation, Leonora and Chiki look enquiringly at one another.

'I think I heard its heart beating.'

Chiki feels something move beneath his fingertips.

'It's kicking.'

What was about to happen? Both of them are afraid. Leonora doesn't stop smoking. Chiki begins to worry.

'How does one live in Mexico without papers and without relatives? How are we going to support ourselves?'

Bringing a child into the world when it is impossible to foresee the future is something that utterly terrifies him. Leonora has hardly put on any weight and walks down the street unaware that she's carrying her foal like a mare. Their problem is money. Harold has disinherited her and shared his fortune between Pat, Gerard and Arthur. Chiki has no sense of how to get his work noticed; he earns almost nothing through his photography and Leonora herself remains unknown as an artist. They live on whatever money Maurie has sent them.

Back at her easel, Leonora paints *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, as viewed by Bosch and by Peter Brueghel the Elder. She situates the

hermit at the waterside with a pink and black piglet. She draws the saint with three heads. A bald young woman, wrapped in a red gown, combines sensuality with the delicacies of the dinner table and is busy preparing a hotpot filled with lobsters, turtles, chickens, tomatoes, mushrooms, Gorgonzola cheese, chocolate, onions and peaches bottled in syrup. The Queen of Sheba, wife of Solomon, and her train of maidens are approaching the hermit, whose sole daily fare is dry pasta and tepid water.

A carrier pigeon flies between Kati's and Leonora's house. Kati has trained it.

Leonora paints feverishly, but has no idea what to do with her finished canvases. The first task is to pay for the doctor and midwife.

'I am strong,' is her assumption. 'The day after the birth of my child, I'll sit down in front of the easel again.'

'You have no inkling of the amount of time a newborn can take up,' Elsie Escobedo scolds her.

'Do you like children?' asks Remedios.

'No.'

'And does Chiki like them?'

'Not as far as I know.'

Two days before the birth, Leonora completes *L'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle*, its title from the final line of Dante's *Paradiso*. A golden carriage — taken from one of the tarot cards — announces their new life. The couple, clothed in red, their arms raised, perform a dance to love and light. On the eve of the arrival of their first child, the painter — who had never previously had recourse to religion — is clearly evoking Ezekiel's vision of God enthroned in the temple among the heavenly host.

When a red bundle is placed in her arms, a diminutive scrap who breathes and opens his mouth, Leonora is stunned. Her heart has never beat so hard.

'Here is your son,' the woman in white tells her. 'Take him.'

'How?'

'Put him to the breast.'

The infant is the most beautiful charge there is.

'He looks just like you,' the nurse confirms.

On 14th July 1946, Bastille Day, Leonora goes through the looking-glass, entering a space she had never previously envisaged: that of motherhood. 'I never thought I would feel like this.' But in the clinic she was already worrying. 'Will he feel cold or hungry? Will he sleep through the night?' Remedios is worried, too, and goes out to smoke in the corridor. Not to mention Chiki, who is anxiously conferring with Kati in Hungarian.

'He will be called Harold,' announces Leonora.

‘Why Harold? Aren’t you are at war with your father?’ exclaims her husband.

‘I want him to be called Harold.’

‘He cut you off penniless.’

‘I want him to be called Harold.’

‘Fine then, Harold Gabriel,’ Chiki intervenes.

‘Everyone in France is celebrating his birth,’ Kati responds, smiling.

In the morning, Chiki would go out to take photographs for the Rotary Club, whose meetings are social events staged in order to fund-raise and endow schools with drinking-water fountains and teaching materials, along with meals delivered to old people’s homes. Chiki looks on in surprise as over-made-up women, straight out of the beauty salon, throw themselves on the trays of canapés and glasses of wine, and recalls the bread distributed to the refugees in Madrid. On every image, another is superimposed in his mind: ‘Why am I doing this to myself?’

When the journalists are unleashed upon a personality, the sound of bombs dropping over Madrid thrums in his ears. A gossip columnist notes down their names, repeating: ‘Yes, a graduate, as you say, with a BA,’ because there’s nothing better than to be graduate Gómez, Sánchez, López, González or Rodríguez, this or that … Their embraces are always loud, their glasses clink ‘cheers’, and Chiki hears the sound of window panes breaking in the Calle de Bravo Murillo, in Madrid. Incredulous, camera in hand, he lives the results of the Mexican Revolution.

‘Did you learn anything worth remembering?’ Leonora enquires on his return.

‘I heard a lady say that she owns nine cars, one for each of her sons, and I saw a member of the National Assembly showing a Rolex to his secretary, saying: ‘Look at this watch! It never fails me.’

‘What was he talking about?’

Chiki changes the subject and insists that his wife ought to give up smoking.

‘That’s one thing I can’t do. What I most need right now is a nice cup of tea.’

The birth of Gaby returns her to her years in the nursery at Crookhey Hall. Leonora stitches him a mermaid out of red velvet, fitted with little pockets to store *centavos*, buttons, marbles. In motherhood she finds herself inclined to make things for the home. She sews, sitting beside the cradle.

‘Just think, I bumped into Renato, and he gave me this poem to recite to you,’ Kati tells her.

‘When you came

when she went
we looked — or did we look? –
with a look that gives nothing away
delicate tea cups
and a lump of sugar
and the tea's amber bubbles.
Forefinger and thumb
so slender, so fine
that seeing them raise the cup of tea
I tell myself:
these fingers will snap …
Where were you? …
Forefinger and thumb raise the cup of tea.
You answer me with those eyes of yours
deep, astonishing,
according to confirmation by the child-god.
Forefinger and thumb
slowly lower the cup of tea.
Where were you? …
And your voice: do you know? …
I burnt myself …'

'I shall invite him to dinner!' Leonora says with a laugh.

Esteban Francés tells her that the great collector Edward James admires both her work and that of Remedios too.

'He saw you with the Escobedos on the beach at Acapulco and you took not the least notice of him; all you did was read.'

'And what is that Englishman doing in Mexico City?' asks Leonora.

'You already know. He's a rare beast, travelling wherever the mood takes him. In New York, Peggy Guggenheim and Man Ray talked to him about you. To painters like us, Mexico is a tomb; you have already put down roots in this well of anguish and I can't tell what is going to become of you or your son. You, who sell nothing that you paint, need to find yourself a patron like him. René Magritte, one of his protégés, painted him from behind as he looked into a mirror, and drew every single hair on the back of his neck, calling the painting *Not to be Reproduced*.

Little by little, Leonora begins to see what they have in common: he is as British as she; as aristocratic as she; as dissatisfied as she; and the owner of a castle in England. Again, just like her, the society photographer Cecil Beaton had taken his photograph; the only difference is that Max Ernst had never painted him in the morning light. West Dean House bears some resemblance to Crookhey Hall and in Monkton House, decorated in style by Dalí, Edward James has

installed two Dalí sofas of pink satin, representing the lips of Mae West, and Dalí has converted a telephone into a lobster.

But Leonora's flat on the Avenida Alvaro Obregón is the antithesis of all that is familiar to James. You enter down a dark corridor that leads directly into the kitchen. Leonora offers him a cup of tea, and sits him down on a hard wooden chair.

'What are you doing in Mexico?' she asks, as she puts water on to boil.

'Geoffrey Gilmore, an old friend from Oxford days, invited me to stay at his house in Cuernavaca and I took the opportunity to come and visit you. Is this your living room?'

'Yes. Remedios Varo calls it my magic grotto. She has even produced a painting of it.'

Tea is construed as a slow, liquid ceremony, and Leonora's hands resting on the oilcloth covering the table are beautiful: small, with no rings on her large, strong fingers, the tools of a woman who suffers and has no control over her nightmares.

'Listen, have you mastered your dreams?' she asks him, offering a second cup of tea.

'Not yet. Do you know what, Leonora? I too had a nanny. My first journey abroad, to San Remo, took place when I was four years old. I remember a whole army of servants, nursemaids and secretaries, huddled together on the boat and, once on dry land, almost filling up an entire busload. Nursemaids are wholly indispensable in the lives of children belonging to our social class. My mother was accustomed to saying to my nanny: "I'd like one of the children to take to Mass with me." "Which one, madam?" "The one whose dress best matches mine."'

'My nanny introduced me to the *sidhes*.'

'I know very well who the *sidhes* are. I would love to see the inside of your studio, Leonora.'

'I'll show you. Let's go.'

They go upstairs to a broom cupboard no bigger than a dovecote. Up until now, the artists James has visited painted in workshops worthy of their work and their fees.

'Is this your *sancta sanctorum*?' asks James in surprise. 'I can't believe it. Do the paintings that so seduce me emerge from here? Out of this keyhole of a place? This is really your *atelier*?' He asks over again, still incredulous.

No-one but Leonora would call it a studio. Ill-lit, narrow, rickety, where the visitor is forced to squeeze himself against the wall when a girl with a broom comes towards him.

'Oh no, don't clean now, today we have a visitor,' Leonora tells her. James turns sideways to let her pass, filled with emotion: Leonora

is even more fantastical than the creatures she paints. Abandoned, orphaned of light and air, this hovel-like box room exults James: on a table lie curled-up tubes of paints, squeezed nearly empty beside the palette; an ashtray overflowing with cigarette stubs; a spider weaving its web. Leonora is a reliquary for every kind of orphanhood, she could paint inside a dustbin. This attic lends itself to the most bizarre mental constructs, and both disturbs and fills him with new energy. People had said that Leonora was a one-off, but he never thought that she assumed such an admirable form. Nothing contaminates her, she does not imitate Ernst, her interior world is hers alone. The only footprints on the way to these gallows are hers alone. A prisoner of herself, she is condemned to be a painter.

Motherhood swallows her up. Nappies, feeding bottles, the 'What's the matter with baby?' refrain, to the astonishment of Chiki, who always hangs back — it all conspires to keep her living on a knife-edge. There is her canvas, stretched on the easel. She has never felt herself to be more productive than here and now.

James is captivated, and offers to buy four paintings for a derisory price. Leonora angrily shows him the way out, without registering that such a gesture only enhances her magnitude in his eyes for, despite having his own full share of caprices and flouted conventions, Edward James knows full well that Leonora's rebelliousness goes well beyond his own. From the word go, Leonora has been confronting authority, defying whatever goes on around her, with a sense of liberty unknown to James. With what a noble bearing she had shown him the door! He returns the next day and offers Leonora his apologies, which she accepts with another: 'Would you like a cup of tea?'

Leonora embraces challenges beyond the norm, her painting comes only from inside of herself, and she makes fun of the intricate system of social privilege and delights her listeners with a high sense of irony. The painter is a free woman, and James confuses delirium with creativity, witty remarks with ideas. He also shares in Leonora's Irish myths and so can enjoy her company even more than anyone else. In return, he introduces her to the wisdom of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead.* His one regret is that she wastes so much time looking after the baby. When he tries to have a conversation with her, Leonora continually warns him that she has to attend to Gaby, or take out the dog, or prepare dinner, or go into the city centre to purchase a canvas measuring precisely 75 by 40 centimetres.

Her house is bare of occasional tables, footstools and trinkets. She was very young when she broke her links with her past, and is determined that nothing at all will cross her. It would never occur to her to decorate the bathroom at Wimpole Street as James did when he

commissioned Paul Nash to design it. Her creative impulses erased the past with a single brush stroke, and she excavated her own way forward like a miner in his coal shaft.

Leonora can discuss any topic with James, secure in the knowledge he understands what she is talking about. What's more, James is a seducer. Leonora is astonished at how much he knows about art. And as for James, his breath is taken away by the manner in which she pays attention to him, observing him with those intelligent eyes, fixed on whatever words fall from his lips. He wants to buy up her entire stock, including work she didn't paint herself. He spends hours in front of the easel and more often than not has a point when he makes an observation such as: 'In my opinion, that figure would look better standing up.' Chiki would never dream of daring to give her any such advice. Leonora is superior to him and Chiki, overly modest, recognises her genius.

Edward James becomes a part of the family. He appears without warning, comes into the studio, examines the painting on the easel, opines that really the blue needs to be a stronger shade, and a few additional coats of red would work wonders for the people in the right-hand corner — or that, on the other hand, the addition of an animal would greatly enhance the bottom left-hand corner. The most important thing of all is to start giving each painting a title, writing it on to each canvas. Leonora consults him. No-one has ever done as much for her before.

'Admirable, admirable! You are making my whole trip to Mexico worthwhile.'

'What kind of a title do you think we ought to give this one?' Leonora asks. His influence is so obvious that she consults him even when she has her paintbrush in her hand. Even while she is painting, James stands at her side, almost without breathing.

What Leonora loves about him is his passion for her, he watches her with an immense curiosity, waiting for what she'll do or say next. He hangs on every word she says, storing them away one by one. Being able to hold a man within such a web of fascination is one more reason for her to consider that she's on the right track. For the first time since she came to Mexico, Leonora finds someone who gives her encouragement. Max always did things differently. Edward confirms that her art is for real, that Leonor Fini does not even come up to her ankles. He buys a few paintings from Remedios, and keeps Kati and José happily on board with projects for the future; but it is Leonora whom he considers the true artist.

James understands her, he is just as much of an eccentric as she is, he values her more than anyone else in Mexico, it's all down to her and her immense talent, a talent that also includes writing, for her

short stories touch him to the core.

'I too know what it is to descend into the hell of depression, Leonora,' he says, referring to her *Memories of Down Below*.

Despite all that has happened to them, neither of them has ever flirted with death. Back in France, in 1937, Leonora heard that some Englishman named Edward James had bought a painting by Max Ernst — *Antipodes of the Landscape* — in the Mayor Gallery in London's Cork Street. This was the first time she had heard of him, when she still had no notion of what a patron might signify. Her only reference point was her image of Peggy Guggenheim, surrounded by dogs, buying the work of another dog, albeit one on two legs, with his tongue hanging out, and with much more of the look of a lapdog about him.

Her protector tells her that her painting is spontaneous and unconscious.

'It's as if your soul conserved the scenes of previous incarnations within it. They are not in the least literary paintings, you have distilled them deep within the cellars of your libido.'

Leonora is apprehensive, and keeps having recourse to him and his refined judgements. Time after time he enlightens her: New York is the market, and James holds the key to it. Which gallery should she first go to? Leonora defends her work like a lioness, as if it were her newborn. Chiki photographs each canvas, their whole life revolves around the painting on the easel before her, the whole household knows that she is the breadwinner. Chiki does not raise his voice, he is prevented by natural humility and an old-fashioned courtesy, which derive from the moment when his mother abandoned him in the orphanage.

Her shoes are too large for Chiki to fill.

James' fascination with Leonora is such that in 1948 he writes an 8-page essay on her work, promotes her heavily, and in less than two months is organising her first show in New York.

'I can't possibly attend the opening. My life is taken up with nappies and feeding bottles.'

The English heir leads a sensational lifestyle and when he travels to take care of his investments, his letters resemble his way of life and invoke creativity. He has money because he knows how to make money; he is successful because he is born to triumph.

'Which gallery do you prefer, Leonora? I advise you to go to Pierre Matisse, you know he is Henri Matisse's son, but there's also a gallery owned by Alexander Iolas. I know them both, I can talk to them and organise a one-man show for you there. I am also in with the dealers — Kirk Askew, Karl Nierendorf, Julien Levy; but I think that the Matisse is the best gallery for you, and if you're happy with that I'll call Pierre.'

Maurie arrives in Mexico and is amazed at how well Leonora attends to her baby.

'You look as if you've done nothing else your whole life long. Aren't you going to have him baptised?' she asks.

'No. He's a Jew.'

'But you're not.'

'No I'm not, but I have always known that I, as a Celt and a Saxon Aryan, have undergone all my privations in the desire to avenge the Jews for the persecutions to which they have been subjected. Even if I *were* one, I would still not impose my religion on any child of mine.'

Leonora had never felt as healthy as she does now. Her painting is a celebration of the birth of Harold Gabriel, whom everyone calls Gaby. She paints in the midst of sleepless nights, nappies and visits to the paediatrician. She paints with fervour, for at any second she may need to stop and attend to her baby. It's a natural instinct to scoop him up in her arms, just as natural as painting. Scarcely has the newborn closed his eyes than his mother runs to the easel to paint *Night Nursery Everything* and *Kitchen Garden of the Eyot.*

For the first time ever, Maurie asks her about the images in her paintings.

'They just arrive and I don't know where they come from,' she replies.

'Maybe they come from your grandmother Monica Mary, do you think?'

'I don't know.'

'Or might they surface from your unconscious, perhaps?'

'I've no idea what part of me they emerge from, nor why I do what I do.'

'It's something you have in your blood. You inherited it from me. I myself used to paint.'

Leonora tries to explain: 'See, Mummy, the figures appear on the canvas all by themselves.'

Leonora would prefer Edward James to return sooner from England, for she misses his ongoing admiration; she writes to him as *Darling* or *Dearest*, and hopes to introduce him to her mother, so she can observe a different member of the English upper class who thinks as she does. From London, Paris and Rome, his letters make good all her weariness. And he can be even more affectionate by letter than he is in person. She sees her connection to this man as a gift: she may freely ask him: 'What colour next?'; 'What's still missing?'; 'What is there that's too much in all this?' If he suggests a different background would work better, she is always inclined to set about changing it. Now she is agonising over what price to ask for her paintings. Edward James assures her that whenever she paints, every inaccessible region

of her brain finds its way to the surface and that's why he too would love to paint. She catches him one afternoon, paintbrush in hand, in front of her *Portrait of the Late Mrs. Partridge* and she erupts in a rage:

'How dare you?'

'I only wanted to help you.'

And he puts down the paintbrush, humiliated.

A young deer-like Oaxacan girl with tightly bound plaits rocks the cradle while Leonora paints.

'In Mexico the nanny is better than the child's own mother,' Maurie now recognises, as she plonks an avocado plant down in the corridor. 'The Mexican sun is too hot for an Irishwoman.'

She wears a wide-brimmed sunhat and is badly affected by the altitude. She regards Chiki with open curiosity.

'This silent man who never speaks a word to me has been good for you. I thought you wouldn't have children; now I can see you've settled down.'

Sometimes Maurie gets up in the middle of the night to rock her grandson in his cradle.

'You look like Nanny Carrington when she rocked Arthur in his crib.'

'She is still alive and wants to see you. When are you coming to England?'

'When Gaby is a little older.'

Maurie never touches on any theme from the past: she doesn't ask after the house in St. Martin d'Ardèche, nor about the flat on the Rue Jacob. Nor, above all, does she ever mention the asylum in Santander. It would be in the worst taste to raise such topics. What would be the point? What is still more unusual is that she has only thought about Harold very occasionally since his death in January 1946. All was gone with the wind on its coal-black wings. Nor can she bring herself to utter Ernst's name, although on one occasion Leonora comments, taking her eyes briefly off the painting on her easel:

'Max would like this one. What do my brothers do with the money my father left them?'

'They drink.'

Maurie buries the past beneath the green lawns of Hazelwood to help it germinate. This may well be the reason for her peaches-and-cream complexion, her shining eyes, the appetite with which she attacks the cheese buns, and the tenderness with which she cuddles her grandson. She only ever sees Chiki at meal times. In addition, Maurie never indulges herself by imagining what might become of her daughter in this tropical country where the people go around barefoot. The ferocity with which Leonora looks after her son surprises her. Maurie was never nearly as close to hers. Others took on

that responsibility. Leonora checks the temperature of the bathwater with her elbow, before bathing the child, and gets him dressed with an equally surprising dexterity.

'Wherever did you learn to do that?'

'From my maternal instinct.'

There is water on the boil to make tea at any and every hour of the day. Leonora introduces papaya to the breakfast table, and Maurie accepts it. 'It helps with your digestion, you know.' Mexican oranges prove just about as good as Valencian ones. Leonora takes the time to fry up the potatoes, and — above all — to make scrambled eggs with chile, Mexican-style.

'I have never tasted anything so delicious. Starting the day with a Mexican breakfast is like manna from Heaven.'

'From the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl, Mama.'

'How can you pronounce such names?'

Leonora has a whole quiver filled with unpronounceable names, all noted down in an exercise book.

A year later, her second son, Pablo, is born. Leonora paints *Chiki, ton pays.* She revisualises the journey her husband has taken from Hungary to France, through Spain and on to Mexico. She again paints a carriage — red this time — red being the colour chosen by the two lovers, advancing down a tunnel, preceded by a jaguar skin, a creature of Mexican mythology. Leonora gives feet to Chiki and claws to herself.

Leonora is flourishing, the perfect model of maternity, and has never been as happy as now. The children appear out of corners, take over the whole house, clambering up the stairs, leaving the doors ajar, and in every window there's a smiling face smeared with chocolate, in every smile milk teeth beginning to protrude.

43. THE ATLANTIC IN SIGHT

CELTIC MYTHOLOGY IS LEONORA'S one religion. Mexico enters her system through her pores, despite the fact that its indigenous peoples live inside a closed world, whose secret even they forgot centuries ago.

Chiki also inhabits a secret place. Mexico is cruel and full of fury. To be a foreigner there carries a stigma.

Within the home, Leonora's English past holds sway. Chiki's Hungarian homeland is relegated to the darkroom. At lunch and again at supper time, the family discuss problems that have arisen at school and try to resolve them between the four of them. They speak French because Chiki detests English; Leonora insists the boys learn it anyway. 'Their grandmother is waiting for them in Hazelwood, how on earth will they converse with her otherwise?'

Chiki confronts Gaby.

'You have to learn to adapt to circumstances.'

'That's impossible. I didn't choose this world and I can't make head or tail of it!'

Leonora takes his side. Gaby finds maths difficult, and Chiki sits with him until the homework is done.

Chiki fears for his children and is more worried than any paterfamilias back in Leonora's native Lancashire. Some don't even bother to check their sons' homework. But Chiki infects his sons with his nervousness.

'You no longer have my permission to go to the cinema today.'

'In any case, it is Mama who is going to take us,' Gaby boasts.

In the Cine de las Américas they always show films of cops and robbers. Every bullet makes her jump.

'Don't be afraid, Ma, I'll protect you your whole life long,' Gaby assures her. Leonora stoically puts up with Westerns with their cowboys and smoking guns, their wagons under attack from Indians who gallop down from the high Sierra between volleys of gunfire. The sound of their horses' hooves stimulates her memories.

'I used to gallop better than that,' she tells Gaby.

'And did you save the young woman?'

'If I couldn't even save myself, how could I possibly save any other young woman?'

Afterwards they drink malted chocolate or strawberry milk-shakes or order banana splits while Leonora complains of the poor quality of her cup of tea.

When they get home, Chiki reads aloud to them from thick volumes published by an imprint called *Labor*. If they are not asleep

by the end, he selects a religious text from the bookshelf, guaranteed to knock them out.

Pablo paints a watercolour that Leonora praises to the skies, and pins it to the wall with a thumb tack.

'Ma, last night the girl I painted leapt out of the picture frame.'

'No need to worry, the ones I paint often escape, too. Yesterday I dressed an old woman in my skirt and jumper, and she turned up at dawn to give me back my clothes: "I have now divested myself of you," she told me.'

Leonora still suffers grave crises. 'I can no longer draw,' she complains and José Horna takes her to Cuernavaca to get some fresh air and be among trees.

Leonora, Chiki, Gaby and Pablo have no other family than their fellow refugees. Kati Horna is the daughter of a Hungarian banker and lost a sister when she was killed back home. Chiki has no reason at all to return to Budapest.

Increasingly desperate, Benjamin Péret rails at Remedios:

'How can you live without even thinking of returning to Europe? Here I feel as if I am dead.'

'Then leave. There is nothing and no-one to keep you here,' replies Remedios impatiently.

'Nothing at all, obviously, apart from the lack of money,' replies Péret ironically.

Péret's Surrealist friends in Paris stump up the cost of his fare. His departure comes as a relief to Remedios. A letter from the south helps her decide to move on to Venezuela where her brother, Rodrigo, lives together with his latest lover, Jean Nicolle, who is a pilot. '…I have a post at the Ministry of Health in Caracas … It will be a pleasure to share my free time with you both.'

Remedios bids Leonora farewell and promises to write: 'I don't know how you even get up the steps on to a plane, Remedios. It always gives me a panic attack.'

In Caracas, Bayer — the same pharmaceutical company as before — employ Remedios to create illustrations of their analgesics. They suggest she should take inspiration from methods of medieval torture. Remedios paints women stabbed and chained to a rack covered in nails, their faces grimacing with pain.

'All I need to do is to look at your illustration for *Rheumatism, Lumbago and Sciatica*. My whole body starts aching and I'm dying for one of those pills,' jokes her brother, Rodrigo.

Leonora realises that as the time goes by, her anguish is starting to return with ever greater force. She struggles to maintain her balance, but there are mornings when she has no desire even to rise from her bed. The sound of Gaby and Pablo's voices is the one string

that leads her out of the labyrinth. Then the painting on her easel summons her.

'It could well be that your anguish is what makes you paint. Have respect for that anguish,' Chiki suggests, in between fetching and carrying their sons.

'And if I were to send it all to the devil and go back to England?' muses Leonora. 'What would that mean? Worse still, does this "all" matter so much alongside that of being in exile?'

'We do nothing for ourselves, it all happens to us,' Chiki says to her.

'You're the one who does nothing, and I'm sick of it,' she answers.

They don't speak to one another for several days.

'There are these times when I feel like an uprooted plant. Max was right, I am "the lover of the wind",' she writes to Remedios.

'I know all about malaria, I'm doing loads of drawings for the Bayer laboratories, I feel calm and have work, and no insect holds any more secrets for me, and that means that I am dedicating my time to entomology …' replies Remedios. 'I think I'll soon be back in Mexico.'

'How long two years can be!' Leonora laments.

In the midst of all this, she paints *Crookhey Hall, Seraputina's Rehearsal, Kandy Murasaki, Plain Chant* and *Nine, Nine, Nine*.

'I've already had my first exhibition at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York, and Edward James is enchanted by whatever I paint,' she writes back proudly.

The births of her two boys and the interventions of Edward James both have a great deal to do with her productivity. When Remedios returns to Mexico in 1949, Leonora's paintings astonish her.

'So all the time I was busy doing illustrations for medical catalogues, you created this miracle? You have progressed so incredibly far!'

The women resume their friendship; they complement each other perfectly. The two heads of tousled hair, one red and the other jet black, promenade up and down Avenida Álvaro Obregón, and into the Sala Margolín, the only shop in town that specialises in classical music. Walter Gruen, now widowed, surprises Remedios with his knowledge.

'I like Stravinsky a lot too,' Walter comments.

'I know Stravinsky, he has been to my house; he never wants to talk about music, only about his sinusitis,' answers Leonora.

'Ravel is my favourite,' interrupts Remedios.

'I'm not sure why, but I've always had the impression that Ravel was going deaf while he was composing his *Bolero*, and that's the reason why it starts out so muted and ends up in the loudest of fanfares,' Leonora interrupts back.

Her comments irritate Walter, while Remedios' seduce him. The old Austrian and his wife Clara were members of the circle that surrounds Remedios, and he still remembers the occasion when one night Leonora served her guests caviar on a silver-plated platter and as Benjamin Péret was helping himself to a full ladle, the Englishwoman confessed:

'It's tapioca we dyed with squid ink; it tastes just the same, though, doesn't it?'

Gruen relished the occasion, but Péret was less pleased about it.

Remedios finds an ocean of peace in the company of the old widower. The idea of becoming a 'serious' artist, as he is proposing, is a temptation. 'You paint and I'll provide.' The couple set up home together in a flat on Avenida Álvaro Obregón.

Now that Remedios is no longer obliged to illustrate laboratory catalogues she can paint *Woman or the Spirit of the Night, Portrait of Baron Angelo Milfastos as a Child* and *The Sorceress.* The year she goes to live with Walter, she completes *Premonition*: three women dressed in white, the Three Fates, running away from a giant spindle whose white threads are attached to their tunics.

Leonora and Remedios confer with each other. Remedios is in love with Piranesi, Goya, Antonello da Messina and Bosch. Where Leonora has her Celtic universe, Remedios constructs her own, beginning with the Garden of Delights, and so with eggs and with minotaurs. Like Leonora, she seeks out the alchemist Nicolas Flamel, along with Basilio Flamentin, Fulcanelli and other occult scholars. Her canvases on the easel are linked to Leonora's:

'I am almost finished with *And Then We Saw the Daughter of the Minotaur*, and it's the first time I've used gold leaf for the faces. If I make the smallest mistake, I lose a whole sheet of gold leaf,' she explains to Leonora.

If Leonora is working late in the afternoon, the children arrive and press their faces to the window panes of her studio. Then Leonora calls out to Chiki:

'What I am doing now requires extreme care, thought and dexterity. The process is a very delicate one, so much so it makes me nervous. Take them out for a walk.'

The first thing she does on finishing her painting is to go round to Remedios' house:

'How wonderful it is that you've come round, Leonora, since I wanted to tell you that last night I dreamt I was bathing a light-coloured cat in the sink; you were the cat, Leonora, and were wearing a yellow coat that needed a jolly good wipe down!'

'And then?'

'Then nothing. I woke up.'

‘Your dream suggests to me that I need to make changes in my life. The truth is I can’t put up with Chiki any more.’

‘It’s more as if it’s Chiki who is the pet cat,’ Remedios counters.

Walter comes in, casts an inquisitive glance around the room, and vanishes again. No sooner has he shut the door than Leonora asks:

‘Doesn’t he irritate you? For me he really is a bore.’

Remedios celebrates her forty-fifth birthday in the flat on Avenida Álvaro Obregón, now rapidly getting too small, and never more so than when employees at the Sala Margolín import six *mariachi* musicians from the Plaza Garibaldi. Their sombreros hem the guests in, the singers have to prop their guitars on their paunches, and Leonora asks them to repeat *Las Mañanitas* — the birthday song — because she’s so fond of the line *cantaron los ruiseñores,* ‘the nightingales sang’.

One of the singers leaves his wide sombrero on a chair, and Pablo empties half a bottle of tequila into the crown.

‘So, why does he leave it lying around any old where? A sombrero that big holds a lot of tequila,’ Leonora invariably defends her son.

To Leonora, whatever her sons do is right.

Kati and José Horna sing along with the *mariachis*; their daughter Norah doesn’t let go of Pablo for an instant and unties her plaits.

‘Kati come over here, take some photos,’ Chiki asks her.

‘I swear, I can’t stand the sound of *La Cansancia*.’

‘You are quite correct to make weariness — which should be *el cansancio* — a feminine noun,’ José announces with a smile.

Certain Spanish words are unique to the Hungarian Kati. She calls her room, which in Spanish is *camara*, her ‘camera’.

The next year, Remedios paints the *Portrait of Walter Gruen.* She hardly ever leaves her easel and hardly ever sleeps. She carries on with *Dressing Table Mirror* and *Space-time Weaving.*

‘Listen, Remedios, why do you work at such a pace? What’s the rush?’

Leonora goes on to paint *Sacrifice to Minos*; she makes scarcely any progress because every time she goes to paint the immolation of the bull, she recalls the *corrida* she went to with Leduc and Gaona.

‘I didn’t want to ruin my Bull of Minos with the body of a man.’

Yet Leonora not only completes her *Sacrifice to Minos* but also paints *Sidhes, the White People of Dana Tuatha Dé Danann.* Gathered around a table, the lunar *sidhes* are celebrating the wedding of Daghda and the Great Goddess. They dance in a ring around the horse venerated for his speed and bravura. They are all beings of light.

Leonora recounts some of her earliest memories. ‘When we used to go out to walk in the park with my grandmother, Mary Monica Moorhead, she would pause and build stone circles to the memory of

the *sidhes*.'

'To transform a little mound of stones into a homage to the dead is a good thing to do. I love those Irish dolmens that look out to sea,' observes Kati.

The 1950s are a decade of great productivity, when the two painters launch their careers, and Kati publishes an increasing number of photos. On top of which, Leonora looks after her sons, and is amused by their witty remarks.

Remedios tells them that the banker Eduardo Villaseñor has commissioned a mural relating the history of his bank:

'I told him that I could paint a man at the entrance to a cave, there to protect a mound of bones with a club. I thought he wouldn't be back after that, but two months later he turned up again: "Could you please paint portraits of my sons, Andrea and Lorenzo?" And so I agreed to do it.'

The same year, Leonora paints *The Chair: Daghda Tuatha Dé Danann*, a homage to the egg and to fertility. In the face of the woman-chair, you can see the desire of the female to be fertilised by the tiny egg which she is about to weigh up in her hands. Sparks of white light flash from the chair, which represents the female sex.

She reprises the theme in *Ab eo quod* and includes an enormous egg, a bunch of grapes and two glasses of wine, along with a text taken from a book on alchemy inscribed with the date 1351, the *Asensus Nigrum*: '*Ab eo, quod nigram caudum habet abstine terrestrium enim decorum est*' ('Keep your distance from any creature with a black tail! That is the beauty of the earth').

A dark face composed of black roots and weeds leers out from underneath the table and it is surrounded by circling moths in the process of turning into butterflies. Remedios comments that:

'You are saving the rest of us from behaving like complete jerks.'

'The yellow butterfly that flaps its wings across the dark face is me; it's me burning,' Leonora admits.

Remedios has her first show in the Galería Diana: 'I'm scared. I've got no idea how they're going to react. Walter calms me down but even so …' The exhibition sells out within three days, and collectors are queuing up to join a waiting list.

'We should celebrate!' Leonora proposes. They eat out in a restaurant, and Leonora orders a bottle of Petrus.

'Where did you learn to taste wine in such a professional manner?' asks Remedios.

'I first learnt when I was young, and I graduated with honours thanks to St. Martin d'Ardèche and to Max.'

All of a sudden, from one day to the next, a trunk appears in the middle of the room.

‘What’s this?’ asks Gaby.

‘It used to be our tea table. Let’s use it to travel to a place far away from civilisation,’ Leonora’s eyes are shining brightly. ‘To England!’

While she packs, their mother regales the boys:

‘I bought it in New York.’

‘It’s the size of a wardrobe,’ Pablo says.

Lined with a patterned wallpaper that would have delighted Max Ernst, it is so vast that it can hold canvases more than a metre in length, paintings and even a small easel, two umbrellas, since over there they are bound to be more expensive, a walking stick, a screwdriver, hammer and nails, numerous cords, some scraps that will doubtless come in useful to patch torn trousers, and an alarm clock that only the English will be able to repair. Leonora packs warm clothes, as the weather in her native country is so unpredictable that, at the least provocation, the skies fall in.

They take the train. Chiki brings them to Buenavista Station with his Basque beret on his head, and stays on the platform to watch them depart, his eyes even redder than usual.

‘Adios, Pa, adios, Pa. When are you going to come and join us?’

‘Hush, I’ve already got enough to do with carrying this trunk,’ Leonora gets increasingly annoyed.

‘I just don’t like seeing him all by himself,’ Pablo says.

‘He’s not all *that* alone, he’ll go round to Kati’s every day.’

In St. Louis, Missouri, they take another train to New York. Nobody seems bothered by the length of the journey. Leonora is a fabulous storyteller, and they learn how Alice dealt her pack of cards; all about the isle of the Lilliputians and the land of Brobdingnag, where everything is outsized, and of Gulliver’s terror of rats and mosquitoes, the greengrocer’s wife who turns into a creeper, the queen who goes crazy in the heat; and of Tartar, the magical horse of Lucrecia — Leonora, and all about Uncle Sam Carrington, who can’t stop laughing whenever the moon is full. Cabin Class is the best and sleeping in its bunks is sheer luxury. ‘Look, I can hardly even fit inside the toilet,’ says Pablo in amazement.

The top deck on the *Queen Elizabeth* is so broad and gazing out to sea such a pleasure. When she is not beside them, Leonora forbids her sons from leaning over the handrail to watch the water slapping the ship’s sides.

She remembers her outward journey to America. Every dawn she would unglue her body from Renato’s and go up on deck to ponder and conjecture her future, and to meditate on whether she might be mistaken in taking such a path into the unknown. One morning she meets Gaby, leaning on his elbows at the handrail, his eyes fixed on

the horizon. ‘How like me this son of mine is!’ she thinks. His hair flowing in the wind, Gabriel Weisz resembles a figurehead on the prow.

‘I have never watched the dawn break before,’ Gaby informs her, when he notices her leaning on the rail at his side. ‘What do you prefer, Ma, dawn or dusk?’

‘Dawn: it’s the start of the world.’

Pablo is asleep while Leonora and her elder son stay up on deck. Leonora remembers that Renato warned her ten years ago: ‘You are coming to see the New World.’ And she followed his drift with: ‘Any moment now, the mermaids will put in an appearance.’

Calais is their port of arrival. From Calais they board another ferry to Southampton, and grandmother Maurie sends a car to pick them up and transport them to Hazelwood.

The symmetrical gardens of Hazelwood Hall were created by Thomas Mawson, the man who went on to design the Peace Palace gardens in The Hague. The children inspect both the house and its garden. They can also hear the sea, and at the first opportunity they race to the beach and hurl themselves into the water, regardless of how icy it is.

In Mexico, the climate is a miracle. In England, every time they go out they have first to cover up completely, and when they come in, to unpeel themselves in the hall, shedding outer skins as if they were onions. They miss the bare heat of the skies of Mexico.

Their grandmother’s spirit has become almost as free as her only daughter’s. She expresses her feelings openly and accepts or rejects whatever occurs with spontaneity. Leonora’s Irish side descends from Maurie, who says what she thinks and, if contradicted, exclaims: ‘Oh what a bloody nuisance!’

Hazelwood Hall, with its balcony overlooking the garden, bewitches her grandchildren: inside are its vast staircase, marble floors, and the medieval suit of armour which they believe to be inhabited by Harold Carrington, and the incredibly intricate barometer that transports them to Alice’s Wonderland. Even when Maurie calls them in to tea, they remain in the company of the Cheshire Cat. Three great arches in the lower half of the house intrigue them, because they are so dark they could well prove the entrance to hell. ‘Ma, are those the arches you paint in your pictures?’

Gaby and Pablo soon take note of the fact that, for their grandmother, each person has their own assigned space and that children are prohibited from interrupting the conversations of adults. Old Nanny, who raised Leonora, and who — despite the mistreatment she endured in Santander — is incapable of feeling resentful, continues repeating the same stories:

‘Cerrid Gwenn went to the woods and chose the healthiest walnut tree according to the great quantity of birds in its crown. He installed the most magic cauldron of all in its shade. Patiently, he blended eight drops of understanding, four rose petals, two drops of advice and a butterfly wing, a pinch of compassion, three trickles of knowledge, five stars from a comet’s tail, two teaspoonfuls of strength, then set all of them on to boil and stirred and stirred and stirred …’

‘Hey, Nanny! So what happened?’ Pablo is getting worried.

‘For the course of one year and a day and without pausing, he kept the flame alive beneath the cauldron. He refined the recipe and added four jasmine flowers. Finally, from the cauldron he withdrew a few magic drops, which he stored in a phial. When he tested out the formula, the effect was immediate: he discovered the secret of Wisdom and was happy from that moment onwards.’

‘I want to have that tiny flask, Nanny — then I wouldn’t have to go to school,’ Pablo says.

‘So then you have to go and look for it, because Gwenn hid it here at Hazelwood, but we’ll keep that for tomorrow, because it’s already tea-time,’ Nanny replies.

Pat and Gerard visit their nephews who have arrived from across the Atlantic Ocean. Pat bores them and Gerard reads his poems and laughs without stopping. Gaby concludes that he must be a good poet, and that living with him must be highly agreeable.

Leonora writes to James, who answers from Paris: ‘I am on the point of boarding the ship for New York, so we’ll see each other next in Mexico.’

They go out for a walk after tea. ‘Hazelwood is full of fairies.’ Leonora assures them her beloved fairies have nothing at all to do with Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy stories.

‘The ancient fairies here are even wilder than the Aztec *chaneque* sprites in Chapultepec. Gaby, you too have Celtic blood in your veins.’

Her sons rush on ahead of her. When they reach the end of the dyke, they run into a red ball that returns their gaze and they ask her what it is. It is the slowly setting sun. To Leonora, seeing the sun on the point of disappearing has confirmed her conviction that she has made a mistake. ‘What am I doing in Mexico? This place is where I belong,’ and she is invaded by the most tremendous sadness.

‘Tomorrow we are leaving for Paris, Ma.’

44. DISAPPOINTMENT

IN PARIS, ANDRÉ BRETON watches the family apprehensively as they enter the Rue Fontaine. Gaby and Pablo play his African drums and wear their masks. 'Aube was never like this, your children are a couple of savages.' His new wife, the Chilean Elisa Claro, makes herself scarce. 'I can't attend to your needs, I am in the middle of a poem.'

Everything has changed. Jacqueline Lamba and her daughter have remained in New York. Breton has remarried and so has she. Both their lives are moving on: it's called old age. Duchamp has also stayed there, keeping company with his bishop, his queen and his castles on the other side of the Atlantic. Man Ray and Max Ernst got married in a double wedding on the same day, the former to Juliet Browner and the latter to Dorothea Tanning. Lee Miller, now separated from Roland Penrose, lives in Sussex with their son.

Breton is surprised that Leonora does not keep company with Diego and Frida, and only occasionally sees Victor Serge and Laurette Séjourné. Leonora tells him that Serge's words on painting were just like Gustav Regler's: 'That worked very well for me.' Lázaro Cárdenas is now no longer the President of the Republic and, ever since Trotsky's assassination, foreigners are looked on askance. The Ministry of the Interior has become much stricter, and Mexico has become unworthy of the republic she once was. Residency visas are less and less frequently renewed, there are no longer trees in the streets, and the forests that once flanked the volcanoes of Popocatapetl and Iztaccihuatl have been felled. The city is becoming covered by a hideous cloak of Toltec cement and machines imported from the United States are tearing down the old mansions built out of *tezontle,* the native volcanic rock. Manuel Ávila Camacho, the new President, has a face like a pudding basin.

'So Mexico is no longer surrealist?'

'Not even the Surrealists are surrealist any more.'

'What of Buñuel?'

'Yes, I see him from time to time, but he never brings his wife with him. What do you think of men who never take their wives out with them?'

'Don't you start … You sound just like Jacqueline!'

Breton invites them to the Café de Flore, but there's not too much to amuse children there. Or grown-ups, as Leonora can confirm. France has still not yet recovered from the war, and the French are already talking about getting the atom bomb.

'Leonora, I have just made known my support for the recognition

of an autonomous Celtic culture.'

Regardless of the fact that Sartre and Camus are the ones who hit the headlines, Breton is still copiously read by the French, and is in the process of preparing a collection of his poems. Interviewed on the radio, he is asked for his opinion on existentialism.

'As you live in Mexico, Leonora, you can stay on the fringes of the latest fashions, and that's a huge asset.'

Breton's political disappointment is obvious and Leonora has no way of responding to his questions on the extent of Trotsky's influence.

'Do you know any of Trotsky's followers?'

'The only one of whom I know anything is Victor Serge, and he only lives to write.'

'I still maintain that no man has the right to impose his authority on another.'

Leonora doesn't answer. What for?

'You have been the muse of superior men,' remarks Breton, with a smile.

Leonora flies into a rage.

'I never had time to be anyone's muse. I have been fully occupied with rebelling against my family, and with learning how to be an artist.'

'Your parents persecuted Max as though he were a psychopath who had to be expelled from society.'

'Yes, they made his life impossible. But then that's exactly what they did to mine, too.'

Conversation languishes, something unthinkable in previous times, and Leonora notes Leonor Fini's arrival with relief.

'Antonin Artaud is dead. I miss his devilish smile. I hardly see Péret any more. Nothing now is as it was before.' And with these words Breton bids his farewell.

Leonor Fini invites them to Les Halles to buy snails, which she intends to serve at a dinner for them and Benjamin Péret.

'No way am I going to eat those poor little creatures,' protests Pablo.

'They are *escargots*. You will be intrigued by them.'

Benjamin Péret takes Pablo by the hand to cross the Boulevard des Capucines. The boy, terrified by the traffic, gives him a kick on the shin, then bites him. On reaching the other side of the street, Leonora reprimands her son:

'What's the matter with you? Do you think you're an Aztec?'

Leonor Fini, Benjamin Péret and Leonora eat every last one of the snails with garlic and white wine, but Gaby protests:

'I am utterly disgusted with you, Ma, I thought you really loved

animals.'

Just like Breton, Péret — now feeling listless — asks a number of times after Remedios and swears he misses Mexico terribly.

'That will be because you always called it the saddest place on earth.'

'I now think that I was the saddest thing about it.'

To the Surrealists, children were *objets trouvés* who had to be kept entertained by someone else, so they could be free to talk to their mother.

'Look out, Pablo's clambering up that Giacometti sculpture.'

'Look at him, he wants to add his improvements to that Picasso.'

'Leonora, if you let your sons loose, they will bring down the Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame and the Arc de Triomphe.'

Leonora no longer calls them the Anti-Christs as she did when they were little, and takes them off to Hauterives and the Rhône Valley to sleep in a barn. Postman Cheval attracts her more than ever when she sees the interest Gaby expresses in him. Pablo takes out a notebook and sketches details of the sculptures. 'They are better than Max's,' he thinks.

The vineyards and the wine harvest also work their spell. Leonora catches flu and the boys go out only when muffled in their newly purchased capes, and bring her herb teas and stewed fruit on her sick-bed. She anxiously pens a letter to Edward James: 'Edward, Is there any way in which we might live in England or in France? Do you think Chiki could find work there? I can paint anywhere, but what do I do with Chiki?'

Edward replies that he will be returning to Mexico at the same time as she is, and shall give her his answer then.

Hardly has he entered the house belonging to Nancy Oaks and Patrick Tritton, on the Calle Marsella in the Colonia Juárez, than Edward fills the space with his guests. They revolve around him as their central figure, and his eagle eyes are ever-ready to pin down their prey. James goes from one side to another with a natural elegance that has them murmuring as he passes. 'He's a multi-millionaire'; 'he's an eccentric'; 'he's a man of the world'; 'if he takes to you, he will give you whatever you want'; 'his house in Sussex, West Dean, contains three hundred rooms and covers two hundred and forty hectares'; 'his divorce from Tilly Losch has cost him an arm and a leg'; 'all his money comes from Marshall Field's'. The vast timber empire he inherited from his father has turned him into a Golden Calf and, as though it mattered, the gossips are certain he is the illegitimate son of King Edward VII, a matter he never took the trouble to contradict.

If he could hear all the conversations buzzing around, no doubt

they would not seem in the least eccentric to him, just as it doesn't appear odd that a person might be born with green hair: 'I have just returned from Ravello, where I rented a villa for the summer'; 'I went, as I do every year, to the Wagner Festival in Bayreuth, famous for exerting such a major influence over the Symbolists'; 'I bought myself a flat on the East River with a view over the Hudson'; 'I would like to bring my horses over to Mexico, but there's no point because here the stable hands are so poor that they'd probably eat them'; 'That's a vile lie, they treated their horses so well throughout the years of the Revolution'; 'They're hungrier now'; 'Do you know where that phone with a receiver like a lobster that Edward James has came from? From a dinner when he and his friends amused themselves by throwing lobster shells at the ceiling and one fell back and landed on the telephone. James then told Dalí to make him a handset in the shape of a lobster'; 'There's nothing more Surreal than James' house in Monkton. In fact it is the most notable example of three-dimensional Surrealism'; 'Edward James paid to have all eleven volumes of his poetry bound and published. And the only thing anyone ever remembers about them is the manufacturer's typography and the luxury of their binding'; 'I knew that in 1938, Oxford University Press published his book *The Bones of my Hand*'; 'What you may not know is that Stephen Spender wrote that it was nothing but the whim of a millionaire. After that, James never published again, other than a few articles in Lord Beaver-book's paper, *The Evening Standard.*'

James goes further than the multi-millionaires who compensate for their lack of creativity by their purchases, for he does indeed have a certain talent. He hires architects and decorators to make over his houses in England. Fabulously rich, he motivates artists such as Stravinsky, Christopher Isherwood, Aldous Huxley and George Balanchine, who after making ruthless use of him cast him aside like a worn sock. Perhaps that is why James always leaves socks behind him wherever he goes.

At the tender age of twenty-one, the young heir exchanged Oxford for a permanent ongoing party. New York, London, Paris, Rome and Berlin are the main points of his compass. Now he happens to be in Mexico, and the one person he notices, the first he makes a beeline towards, parting a way through all the other guests, is Leonora.

'I came because of you.'

45. EDWARD JAMES

WHEN EDWARD JAMES ARRIVES at Leonora's dark house he sees *The Giantess* standing on the easel, and immediately knows he is standing in front of a masterpiece. Leonora explains that the painting is the fruit of her reading of Jonathan Swift:

'She is an inhabitant of the Island of Brobdingnag.'

'She looks as if she might arise from the beginnings of creation, from chaos. Look at the despair of those men struggling to save themselves,' James comments.

'The ones out there at sea rowing?'

James continues, utterly absorbed: 'Your giantess shelters a tiny egg in her hands. In comparison to her body, her hands are diminutive. Beneath her feet are horses and humans bearing bows, arrows and lances, fleeing in terror. They have never seen a sight remotely like this before. Leonora, you are the giantess in your painting,' declares James. 'I'll buy it from you!'

Gaby and Pablo return from school and, on seeing *The Giantess* on the easel, ask their mother if it is her self-portrait from when she was a little girl, because her head is circled with stardust; and pelicans, gulls and ships sally forth from her white cape. Nothing could be more natural than for the children to come in and interrupt her, bumping into her easel, borrowing her paints — most especially Pablo, who without more ado helps himself to her paintbrushes.

'Who is that man, Mama?'

'He is an Englishman who flew in and landed on the flat roof of our house.'

'Is he an Englishman or a swan?'

'If I tell you he flew all the way here, he could as well be a migrating bird or a purple heron.'

Edward James is enchanted by the tale of the purple heron, which the Mexicans call an imperial bird. 'Children always tell the truth, and it's clear that I look very good painted as the heron. But Leonora, the light is atrocious,' he commiserates.

'It doesn't matter. In any case, as soon as my children get in from school, I stop painting.'

'Everyone talks about the light in Mexico, but it's as if it doesn't exist for you.'

'It's that I wanted so much for Europe to be my children's homeland.'

'But you still stayed here, didn't you?'

'I never actually decided to, it just happened that way.'

The general interest US magazine *Town & Country* publishes a

photograph of *The Giantess* (also known as *The Guardian of the Egg*) alongside a story called *Un Jour* by Jean Malaquais, whom Leonora recalls having seen walking around Paris looking like a vagrant. Max had mentioned how: 'The idealism of this Pole enchants me.' Vladimir Lalacki, who wrote about the concentration camp where he was imprisoned, is also now living in Mexico.

'Look at this! *Time* and *Art News* magazines are reviewing your work. Where do you keep the articles that get written about you?'

'I don't keep them. Maybe Chiki does, I don't know.'

'The magazine *Horizon* has a litany of eulogies to you. Did you see that Victor Serge wrote of how your painting stirs his emotions because it reflects "an adolescent but luminous interior life"? Gustav Regler also reproduces two of your paintings.'

Leonora is flattered by the article because the novelist Regler fought in the Twelfth International Brigade in Spain, and, now he is in Mexico, has grown passionate about its pre-Hispanic cultures.

Leonora appears in the catalogue of the Bel Ami International Art Competition, next to Salvador Dalí, Paul Delvaux, Max Ernst, and Ernst's new wife, Dorothea Tanning.

In February 1950, the Clardecor Gallery, which specialises in interior design, offers her its wall space.

'A furniture shop?'

'Leonora, *this is Mexico*,' responds Edward.

'It's not exactly what you deserve, but at least it can be an opportunity for the Mexicans to sit up and take notice of you,' adds Esteban Francés.

Inés Amor, a tiny woman with ankles so slender they could belong to a canary and who smokes at least as much as — if not more than — Leonora, scrutinises every picture she brings into Clardecor minutely. She is the director of the Gallery of Mexican Art. 'This woman certainly knows how to sell,' Jesús Bal y Gay whispers in Leonora's ear. The majority of her clients are from the United States. In spite of her fragile physical appearance, she has a will of iron. 'You will see how the Mexicans are going to treat you once you have me at your side,' Inés comforts Leonora as she complains of the xenophobia that surrounds her.

'Unless I turn into a *chichimeca* native, one of those the Aztecs fought for centuries, I don't think they'll ever pay the least attention to me. I have never painted a single, solitary slice of a water melon.'

'Things are going to change once I am involved.'

And so it comes to pass that Leonora is recognised as an artist who belongs to Mexico and is included in the exhibition 'A Portrait of Contemporary Mexico', sponsored by the National Museum of Modern Art and National Fine Arts Institute. When Inés Amor inaugurates her

first solo show on the Calle Milan, the critics talk of her technique and of the mysterious nature of her subjects: Margarita Nelken, a refugee from the Spanish Civil War, writes in *Excelsior* that it is the best exhibition on show in Mexico. Antonio Ruiz, known by the nickname of *El Corcito* (the Buck) because of his resemblance to an eponymous bullfighter, declares that at long last he has found an identical twin soul.

'How well you are doing in Inés Amor's hands!' Gunther Gerzso congratulates her. 'She is the only one who can persuade a buyer to do as she wishes.'

Leonora and her children attend *Dante's Inferno: The Ballet* choreographed by George Balanchine, who a few days later turns up on the doorstep with a suitcase stuffed with plans and programmes so that Leonora can design the sets and the wardrobe. Opting for a change of surroundings, she invites Balanchine into the kitchen and offers him tea.

'How can I spread out my floor plans if the cat is sitting on the table?'

'Pablo, *get* Kitty.'

Pablo, in a night shirt since it's already bed-time, chases after the cat who, in its turn, is intent on catching a mouse; but since Kitty can hardly see any more, the little mouse gets into the sleeve of his night shirt and, when he realises it, the boy races up and downstairs, creating the maximum rumpus.

'Ma, the mouse is biting me, the mouse is eating my arm.' His screams grow more and more shrill. Although they are now very old, Dicky and Daisy bark ceaselessly. Balanchine, who has been unable to take so much as a sip of tea, gets to his feet and joins in the shouting:

'This is no place to work, it's impossible! We don't have a single moment of peace, this house is like a mental asylum!'

He packs up his things and departs.

'Why did you do that?' Chiki asks Pablo.

'The mouse crept into my sleeve, and I only noticed when it began to race up my arm.'

'Now it's high time you went and said sorry to your mother.'

Chiki punishes him with his silence. In contrast, Leonora consoles him:

'Don't be afraid, you didn't do anything wrong, it's Balanchine who has made an idiot of himself. If he'd been seriously interested, he would have put up with it and stuck around.'

Leonora paints without a pause. It is 1957, and her second show at the Antonio Souza Gallery brings in fresh admirers.

The entire attention of the vanguard is focused on the Galeria Souza, where the most unexpected artists are always on show. The

public is just as unusual. María Félix, Juan Rulfo, Maka Tchernichew, Patsy O'Gorman, Mathias Goeritz, Gunther Gerzso and Juan Soriano chat to Rufino Tamayo, who serves himself a tequila. Bridget Tichenor leaves with Pedro Friedeberg, her kindred spirit. 'You have to see the de Chirico that Bridget has hanging in her living room,' Antonio Souza tells Eugenia Orendain. Souza, who wears a little blue flower in his lapel that he — oddly — calls his paint-brush, provides a running commentary that would have caused the Marquis de Sade or the Bloody Countess to blush. Cynical and witty, he alters the names of his painters and ascribes a Benjamin López to Francisco Toledo. Paul Antragne, a young debutant, locks himself in the bathroom to consume his drugs. The smile worn by Pedro Friedeberg, de Souza's close friend, is a cause for pleasantries, since ambassadors, cultural attachés, Bona de Pisis and André Pieyre de Mandiargues are all seated on his wooden chairs in the shape of a hand. In 1938, Kurt Seligmann convulsed the whole of Parisian society with a chair he called *ultra-furniture* supported by three sensual women's legs. Finally, 'Mexiquito' — little Mexico — is pulling aside its nopal curtain, just as José Luis Cuevas predicted when he gave the muralist David Siqueiros a trashing, before bestowing another on Diego Rivera. 'Out of my way, juvenile mouse-face!' riposted Rivera. One of Leonora's paintings is included in an exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Houston called *The Disquietening Muse: Surrealism.* 'Now you see how I succeed in internationalising my painters!' cries the poet Souza, owner of the most snobbish gallery in the country.

Each time Edward James returns from a journey, he invades their house with a cohort of serpents and macaws, which the Hotel Francis won't allow him to bring indoors. The iguanas hang out on the flat roof, the parrots and kites flit about indoors, and the tortoises get lost in the corridors; five parakeets imported from Manaus chatter without pausing for breath, and seven badgers — so fierce that not even Kitty will go near them — shit all over the house.

He puts them in the care of Leonora; in the end, even she complains.

'Could you not take them up on the flat roof so that they can get some sun, Leonora?' Edward continues persistently.

'How about he puts those socks of his, the ones he always leaves around for us to find hidden behind bedroom doors, out there for a bit of a bleach in the sun?' protests Pablo.

Edward is by now the patron of the Weisz family. This clearly allows him to feel at liberty to leave his disgusting yellow socks in any corner of any room, which deeply offends Pablo. James' eccentricities irritate Leonora too, at times, and she returns to the house, her eyes black with anger. Even so, Leonora always enjoys going out with him.

That was how James came to invite her to dine at the University Club on the Paseo de la Reforma, and when the time came to pay, pulled out an envelope stuffed with only one *peso* notes and asked if she had any cash on her. Leonora grew enraged: 'Now we'll have to stay and do the washing up, since I don't have a solitary *centavo* on me.'

The Weisz household looks after the reliquaries he steals from rural churches and dusty rectories: saints missing hands or whole arms, and a beautifully ornate *churrigueresco* — a Mexican baroque crucifix — that James was to reclaim two or three years later.

Leonora has less patience than Kati with armadillos and iguanas. Pablo is shocked that James uses shampoo for washing his hands, and leaves the towels flung down on the floor; that a whole toilet roll gets used in one go; and that he leaves the bathroom floor soaking wet, whereas he and Gaby are always obliged by their parents to clean up after themselves.

'Mama, we really can't stand James any more,' Pablo tells her.

'You may not be able to stand him, but without him we'd have nothing to eat.'

Gaby shakes his head in resignation, while Pablo shows his indignation: 'I would prefer to die of hunger than put up with his smelly yellow socks any longer.'

'And you haven't even read his poetry. It's even worse than his socks!' Gaby offers by way of consolation.

46. A PALACE IN THE JUNGLE

EDWARD JAMES ARRIVES BY CAR from the United States, using the newly inaugurated Mexico City — Laredo freeway and crossing the ancient lands of the Huasteca people, who inhabit the south-eastern region of San Luis Potosí. The hotel built in the jungle at Taninul is a Surrealist phantasm, and its vast hot thermal baths reflect the skies overhead. 'We are immersed in a Rousseau painting. There can be no doubt he painted *The Dream* right here.' James goes crazy over the orchids hanging from the trees. In Tamazunchale he asks for more and more orchids:

'Then you need to go to Xilitla, *jefe*!'

The English heir stubbornly insists on going on foot to Xilitla. This involves walking fourteen kilometres along dirt tracks; when night begins to fall, a cold wind causes him to shiver like a leaf. All at once he asks his companion, a retired sergeant from the US army named Ronald McKenzie, to pass him the suitcase:

'In there, underneath the bananas and oranges, I packed a toilet roll. Please pass it to me as quickly as possible.'

He unravels it round and round himself: 'This is my method of conserving body heat.' An hour later, the local residents are surprised to see a mummy shrouded in toilet paper enter their village.

Xilitla village lies on a coffee-growing hillside in the San Luis Potosí, part of the Huasteca region which straddles four Mexican states. Protected by the Eastern Sierra Madre, its houses are built of wood and have pitched roofs. James enters the rain forest and discovers the miniature paradise they call Las Pozas, 'The Pools', because deep springs of clear water well up at intervals in the River Tancuilin. There, in the midst of luxuriant vegetation, orchids reign supreme, and from among them emerges Plutarco Gastélum, a young man of twenty-nine years old, slim and tall, with a high forehead and a fine Aquiline nose.

To Plutarco, this new arrival provides a novel spectacle. Tall and distinguished, wearing a yellow and gold Indian tunic, his wild gesticulations are those of astonishment and jubilation and his smile swings from one tree to the next.

Exclamations of 'Incredible!' and 'Marvellous!' are accompanied by further extravagant gestures. 'I have reached the promised land! This is the ground upon which I shall raise my house!'

'That's what they're all like, everyone who arrives here from across the ocean. No doubt Hernán Cortés uttered all the same expressions of astonishment,' is Plutarco's thinking. 'This white man, despite his obvious enthusiasm, is yet another *conquistador*, one can

only follow in his slipstream, and comply with his every whim, however bizarre they may seem.'

'Here in my private paradise I can defy even death,' shouts James, waving his arms in the air. In the evening he calms down and writes: 'My house has wings and sometimes, in the depths of night, it sings.'

The inhabitants look on in surprise while the euphoric tourist takes his daily bathe in the nude down at one of the nine river pools, then spends hours on end seated beneath the trees, drawing in his sketchbook the monuments he has in mind to build in the midst of this paradisical garden.

James erects thirty-eight cement sculptures in Xilitla; immense flowers with stone petals, giant four-leaf clovers, rings and vipers. When Leonora tells him she would adore to be a bat, he has the bright idea of creating an Arcade of Bats in homage to her, as he also does to Max Ernst. He constructs the house on three floors with the potential to have another couple of storeys added, making five. He names them the House of Peristyles; the House of Plants; the Gates of Saint Peter and Saint Paul; the Terrace of the Tigers and the Summer Palace.

Nothing leads anywhere else, for James inverts arches, balances columns, has doors opening onto chasms, uses rods to reinforce the cement in a manner that defies logic, and leaves parts exposed to the most inclement variations in the weather system. Nothing lies on the far side of the bridge; balconies extend out over suicidally steep abysses; here all sense of the future is abolished, and nothing is guaranteed. His cement cobwebs spun out across a void have meaning only for him. At last he has achieved what he was never quite able to reach in his poetry: to reveal himself by announcing: 'This is who I am.' In the Huasteca jungle his cry is that of the avenged. Here his dreams and his creatures can roam free, and he can sleep soundly in the vast tropical hammock he has constructed beneath the stars.

'Here is all that I love! This is my sky and my abyss, my heaven and hell. Piranesi and Gaudí, Escher and Chichen Itza are my masters.'

The astonished people of Potosí humour him obediently, as Don Carmelo Muñoz calculates the composition and dimensions of his rods, weights and levers. Under his guidance, they tip the cement mix into prodigious moulds made of wood, doubling the number of rods, transporting the cement in wheelbarrows, smoothing the bricks with a trowel, and going so far as to ask whether 'the madman' is going to build houses for them too. 'Of course he will,' responds Plutarco. He points James out to them, with a macaw on his shoulder he calls Eulalia, to whom he sings lullabies or recites his poetry.

The vast cloud of Monarch butterflies that seek sanctuary there is the icing on the cake. 'If you stay silent, you can hear them flutter; they are more than likely your guardian angels.' The cloud of

butterflies is there just for him. The marvel is that they have had to cross more than four thousand kilometres simply in order to reproduce here, in Xilitla, just as he covered the whole of the Earth in order to embrace Plutarco. James, who comes from so far away, is feeling for the first time an insatiable love for this young man of the *yaqui* people, who gazes at him like a roe deer. What do infinite distances matter if at long last he has discovered his reason for living! Everything he has seen and loved is now incarnate in Plutarco. If copulation lasts an hour or more for the Monarch butterflies, James would make it last until the hour he dies. James grows crazy:

'It takes between four and twelve days for the tiny egg to turn into a caterpillar. I shall turn you into the most dazzling, luxuriant and fresh butterfly ever, the only one to have access to the calyx of all the flowers. Within you shall all three kingdoms reside. Plutarco, you arrive at my domain in a mantle of butterflies, you are as noble and powerful as they, you reign sovereign over far distances, the king of kings, my emperor, the sultan of the desires I have harboured since childhood, an aristocrat with wings, the prince of fluttering wings. You are all I have ever dreamt of, you were the caterpillar in a body no more than five grams in weight and ten centimetres long, and now look what you have become! Until I found you, the world to me was absurd and senseless; now at last you demonstrate a world that is coherent and harmonious to me. Do you realise all this, Plutarco?'

He recites him the legendary poem, *The Conference of the Fowls* by the twelfth-century Persian poet Farid al-Din Attar, who describes the flight of the birds in search of their king.

'You are my vale of dangers and marvels.'

There is no-one on Earth more desirable than Plutarco. To the *yaqui*, born in Sonora, all the rulers of the Earth will offer praise. 'Plutarco in swimming trunks is the most perfect specimen of Yuku, the *yaqui* god of rain.' James photographs him constantly; back in New York, he commissions Tchelitchew to paint his wonderful body in order to add the best model there is to his already extensive collection. 'You will see what a man he is!' He goes so far as to order Leonora:

'You have to see him, Leonora. He is Adonis incarnate, the finest man ever created; you will never see anything more beautiful on Earth.' He invites her to accompany him to Xilitla.

'With Gaby and Pablo as well?'

'Of course!'

By now, James has bought himself a trailer and they set out for Xilitla in the middle of a storm, which causes the water to rise as high as the mudguards. Leonora sits in the front, beside Plutarco, and the children go behind with James.

‘Ma, what are we going to have for breakfast?’

‘Two rhinoceroses, one tapir, one yellow bird, three fingers from a nun. You are then forbidden to swim in the river pools for at least an hour, in case you get indigestion.’

Plutarco dives in and emerges from the waters shining and muscular. Everyone applauds and he acknowledges the compliment with supreme graciousness. James runs over to him, holds out a towel, and turns him round to face Leonora, Gaby and Pablo. ‘This is the son of Tlaloc and Coatlicue and he is God.’ James bows to the ground, and affects to kiss his feet. Plutarco acts either timid or inhibited. ‘Foreigners never restrain their desires,’ he thinks, and Leonora comments ‘Edward is making a fool of himself,’ as she hints at a smile of complicity, or possibly of jealousy. James now wants everyone to dive into the pool as nude as he, and the villagers from Potosí shift quietly away to vanish from the scene. ‘Good grief, what kind of a mad goat is he?’ Yet James insists that all his employees strip naked and bathe together with him. Plutarco protests: ‘But it embarrasses them!’ Don Cipriano explains that the rich are like that, for they think that everything is permitted them. James has never been so happy, he talks like a parrot and goes around with a boa as a mascot wrapped around one arm, and a small crocodile on the other. Or perhaps it was an iguana?

Gaby is fascinated by the glow-worms, and Pablo by the grass-hoppers, which he stores in a metal box well away from the mad excesses of adults.

Edward James, filled with emotion, invites Gastélum inside: ‘Little Plutarco, I shall now show you the wonders of civilisation.’

He introduces him to the trailer with its bath and kitchenette, lighting the gas flame, and Plutarco leaps backwards to exclaim: ‘Ooooh!’ Then he shows him the fridge and Plutarco again goes: ‘Ooooh!’

‘Come on, have you really never seen anything like this before?’ Pablo asks him.

‘Of course I have, and I’m no stranger to gas, iceboxes and electricity. But if it gives him pleasure, then I’ll play the fool.’

‘And everyone else here is also playing the fool?’ Pablo enquires again, who won’t let anything get by him.

‘No, they pass themselves off as smart, but I have them well under my control.’

Edward can no longer find further means to conquer Plutarco, and in addition to purchasing him forty hectares of land and building him a castle, he takes every opportunity to keep reciting the sayings of the Greek Plutarch to him, only to be greeted by his homonym with considerable scepticism. ‘To cling to every form of pleasure is utterly

irrational, but to avoid every form of pleasure is utterly insensate' or 'I have no need of a friend who changes when I change, and who nods when I nod. My shadow does that much better.'

'Did you know that Plutarch had a major influence on Shakespeare, my little Plutarco?'

Pablo trails after the adults, and Gaby isolates himself. He reads *Tarzan* — his book of choice — over and over again, because it's so easy to picture his hero swinging from the lianas with Chita clinging to his neck, there at the heart of the rainforest.

What delights Gaby the most is not having to go to school in the middle of the exam period.

'Do you like it here?' he asks his mother. 'This is paradise: but the gates to heaven are so close to those of hell.'

Whether the children miss school or not is a problem for Chiki alone.

When Pablo spots Edward asleep in his hammock, he picks up a caterpillar and drops it into his open mouth.

'Did you see what your son just did?' asks Edward as he wakes up, all the more annoyed because Plutarco is laughing at him.

Leonora, flushed with the heat, her hair electrified by the humidity, paints on a wall using a sepia palette, the picture of a tall and slender woman with the head of a ram, while her sons continue playing, and James falls asleep again, hidden beneath his straw hat.

James keeps paintings by Varo, Carrington and de Chirico in one of his houses. He stacks the pictures against the damp walls, among the moss and roots, at the risk of ruining them. The floor is made of compacted earth, and fungi sprout in its corners.

Of Leonora's two sons, James prefers Gaby and lets it be clearly known. He gives the elder son a puzzle with more than a hundred pieces and a picture of a trailer on it. 'What a beauty!' In contrast, Pablo is given a badly wrapped package. When he opens it he asks: 'Why has he given me a china doll when I'm not a girl?'

When James bids farewell in order to embark on one of his many trips to the United States, England or Italy, he assembles the sixty-eight builders and puts them in charge of the orchids.

The variety of flowers in the rain forest is phenomenal. Edward tells his men: 'Look at these roots. Don't they look like testicles to you? Look after them carefully, and take note that they are extensions of myself.'

They all nod solemnly together.

That year, eighteen thousand orchids are killed by frost.

47. THE WEIGHT OF EXILE

WALKING DOWN AVENIDA ÁLVARO OBREGÓN and sipping tea deep within the warm grotto of her dark kitchen evokes for Leonora the flavour of London. When she emerges for her afternoon walk in the rainy season, the scent of freshly mown grass transports her back to Hazelwood.

If living one's life is hard work, maybe that is a reason why so many exiles regard having recourse to a spiritual guide — whether a guru, a psychiatrist, or a father figure — as a basic necessity. Nostalgia for a land left behind can poison one's whole system.

'Do you identify with that line of maguey cacti advancing across the Mexican plains like a green army, Leonora?' Remedios asks her.

'What I mostly identify with is tequila.'

Even now, she is not acclimatised to the noisy shouting that greets Independence Day every 15th September, nor the quantities of street children, dogs that never sleep, or fireworks let loose on saints' days, the continuous abuse of authority, pilgrimages on 12th December, still less the laconic tolerance of extreme unpunctuality, the expression 'What may I do to assist you?' cravenly summarised in the single word '*Mande*?' She lives with one foot on the land where she was conceived, from where an ocean now separates her.

The day that a Mexican state functionary gives up his uniform and walks among the people like one of them, or the day when a woman stands up to her abusive husband, Leonora will feel more at home in Mexico. This is a country crawling with paper-qualified bureaucrats: they spread like fungi in the court rooms, the registry offices, and in the Church. The queues to renew every kind of document or registration paper run the length of the Calle de Bucareli and are a source of absolute torture: 'I cannot possibly extend your visa. You are obliged to first leave and then re-enter the country.' 'We shall have to impose a fine on you for failing to inform us of your change of address.' 'But that's not my fault! The street's name was changed by order of the government.' 'Then that's the government's business, and you need to take care of your own.' 'What's this? Don't you have a mother? Why do you give me your documents with only your father's surname on them?'

'There's a monologue running around my brain that I can't silence and it's killing me,' she tells Remedios. 'It never gives up, but just repeats and repeats and repeats, and no matter what I try it keeps spinning round in my head. It accompanies me everywhere from the moment I wake in the morning.'

'Then jump out of bed and go for a walk,' Remedios recommends.

‘I can’t stand Chiki any longer, and I can’t even stand myself any more. I’m in bits, my body feels fragmented, and I don’t know how to piece it back together again.’

‘You did the right thing in marrying Weisz. He is a good, sound and intelligent man. It was thanks to him that I got Lizárraga released, once I recognised him as an inmate in the concentration camp that Chiki filmed in France.’

‘Well, Chiki never saved *me* from anything at all.’

‘Don’t be unfair, Chiki breaks his back for all four of you. Why not come along with us to Onslow Ford’s house at Erongarícuaro: Eva Sulzer and I came back feeling quite renewed after a visit there. It’s an oasis of peace. We were studying Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, who can both lead us to a higher life.’

‘I feel that my anxiety will never leave me, for I *am* that anxiety. Each morning I wake up on the edge of that precipice in the conviction that my fall is imminent and terrifying.’

Leonora and Remedios share their inner lives.

‘I am fascinated by your *Anguish*, Remedios. But why did you sign it Uranga?’

‘Because it was for the Bayer Chemical Company,’ Remedios answers.

‘It feels as if you painted my portrait.’

‘Not at all, Leonora, so please don’t say that. You’re not tied down. In any case, you are lucky enough to have a superior intelligence.’

Chiki waits for the cashier who, from behind her little window, is going to push through a yellow envelope with his payment and the receipt for the seven copies of *Novedades* that have accumulated in his mailbox. As time goes by, he chooses different newspapers at random. These ones are over six months old. Inside one he reads: ‘Robert Capa’s death is a major loss to photo-journalism.’ His heart leaps in his throat. Robert Capa died in Indochina on 25th May 1954. He stepped on a land mine that blew off his left leg and tore open his chest. At the moment of death, he still held his Contax camera in his hand; the blast caused his Nikon to land some metres further on.

Chiki half-turns. He boards the Roma — Mérida bus that goes down the Calle Tabasco: he has to go and find Kati. The urgent need to hurry accelerates his breathing and constricts his chest. He is transported back to Madrid 1938; to the Pix agency and to the French magazine *Clartés*, to Simon Guttmann and to Chim. What will become of Chim? Above all, he thinks of Kati, who had loved Capa ever since she was a teenager. Capa’s death doesn’t seem possible, he is better than anyone else at estimating risks. Capa was all that Chiki couldn’t or didn’t want to be. He made the most beautiful women around lose

their heads over him; seduced even the most powerful men; drank Martinis and harangued waiters; made instant friends with whomever he met in a bar; and above all played out his life on a battlefield in order to obtain action pictures of wars that were syndicated across the world.

'Kati, Bandi is dead!' he tells her in Hungarian.

Kati barely opens her weary eyes before lighting up a cigarette.

'I already knew.'

'You knew and you didn't tell me?'

'I knew deep inside myself.'

Chiki collapses. His whole life through, there had been someone who got in ahead of him.

'Let's go and sit outside to see whether it's true that, as Octavio Paz says, happiness is a chair in the sun.'

Cigarette in hand, the sun at its noonday height, they again recall their Jewish origins, and Hungary, the Pecsi school, and how — although still adolescent — Bandi longed to devour the world, and how Kati was always his port in a storm; Kati, his anchor; Kati, the voice of his conscience, for she never needed to change her mind, renounce her anarchist faith, nor betray the peasant woman in her head-scarf whose portrait she took for one of the many posters she made for the Federation of Iberian Anarchists. Bandi sought out fame, while his companions never allowed themselves to submit to that kind of pressure.

The Katherine Deutsch of his childhood in Budapest was the only one he knew. Had war not broken out, the intrepid Bandi would have been a theatre director in Buda, the home city of the two of them; with her, Kati, as his leading lady.

'Women all over the world must be in tears, Ingrid Bergman more so than any of them.'

'What about you, Kati?'

'I have been feeling desolate about losing him for a long while already.'

'I'll ring Leonora and Remedios.'

The three women share a common European past, along with the war, their art, and feeling orphaned. The three of them keep one another company, motivate one another, console each other, share the same reasons for living.

Wolfgang Paalen surrounds himself with the *trouvailles* he has found on his travels: they include a petrified whale penis over three metres long that he hangs from a beam in his studio.

'Why don't you sell your penis?' asks Kati. 'I have a millionaire friend who would be sure to buy it from you.'

Just as Leonora paints horses, Remedios accumulates cats and

owls on her canvases.

'Why do you paint owls when it's said that they augur death?' Gaby asks Remedios.

'Because I am death's bride.'

'Mama paints Boadicea and says this warrior queen always led her cavalry into battle herself and was just as much of a redhead as you are.'

'Do you like what I paint?'

'Pablo likes Magritte better.'

'And you?'

'I like the *The Fern Cat*.'

Leonora has been consulting the psychoanalyst Ramón Parres for some time, since between painting each of her pictures she always falls into a deep depression. Painting is her balsam, as opium was for Joë Bousquet, but there are also mornings when anxiety asphyxiates her, even when she's standing before her easel. She can't identify the features of the beast, something that causes her to lash out blindly. She calls up Pedro Friedeberg in a state of high anxiety.

'Can you please take me to the madhouse in your car?'

Chiki begs her to calm down.

'Chiki each one of us is the master or mistress of our destiny, and I am not going to let you push me under.'

He keeps his silence. His wife's temperamental outbursts go well beyond his capacity to deal with them.

Pedro waits outside in his car to bring her back home:

'Do you know, Leonora, the day will come when psychology, psychiatry and hypnotism will be swept from the face of the Earth for being a danger to Public Health.'

Remedios, just like Leonora, wants to achieve self-perfection. Peaceful interludes are brief, and Erongarícuaro is a source of consolation, the more so since Gordon Onslow Ford is a close friend:

'Remedios, you paint a universe where everything is relative. Don't worry so much, your art transports you to the cosmos,' Gordon tells her.

'Sometimes my visions are terrifyingly earthly ones.'

'Paint your dreams, Remedios, and tell Leonora to do the same; she seems more anguished than you.'

'She has a capacity for rage that I lack. What I would like is to be able to stop waving my arms about as if I were drowning. That is why I am seeking a guide.'

'Living among exiles forces you to feel excluded, you really ought to see other people.'

'We are a family of our own. The Mexicans are not in the least interested in us. When I go to their gatherings, they never ask me

what I do, nor how I earn my living.'

'And as for you, do you ask *them*?'

'No, I suppose I don't.'

Via the British Embassy, Leonora discovers the Englishman Rodney Collin Smith, who came to Mexico a year after the death of his master, Ouspensky.

'He is one of the illuminati, and just the person you were looking for,' Elsie Escobedo tells her. 'He was Ouspensky's constant companion when he was a broken man, buried in a mire of self-pity. Seeing him die in a drunken stupor brought him to the decision that he should himself become a spiritual guide.'

'In any case I'd like to hear him, since in addition to the ways of the fakir, the monk and the yogi, there is a fourth way: the sublimation of sexual energy that, and I think here you will concur with me, is a source of enormous power.'

'It seems to me that you have no need of any of these secondrate Rasputins. Just take a cold bath, both you and Remedios. It's healthier and more effective than your fourth way!'

Rodney Collin Smith is innocent and credulous and everyone takes advantage of him. He puts himself at the service of every next person, lurching to meet the most lavish desires of the person nearest at hand.

'Do you require anything more?' he always asks, before exhausting himself in supplying whatever it is. He builds a planetarium because he believes that cells and galaxies are one and the same thing, and that each person has their own guiding star. Ouspensky's *New Model of the Universe* is his Bible. His wife, Janet, establishes a clinic for the poor.

They buy a leafy plot of land near to the paper factory at Peña Pobre, to use for spiritual retreats, and Leonora falls in love with its vast garden filled with geraniums and dog roses. Peña Pobre is an oasis of green hemmed in by cement. Every acolyte is given their own cabin, while Rodney, together with his wife and three employees, occupy the main house. The spiritual guide runs up and down the garden paths as if he were levitating.

When he comes to welcome them, he explains:

'Here we are separated from the outside world, in the midst of a desert we may only traverse alone and in silence. Do not be afraid if you come up against your inner fears, for I shall always be there for you.'

Punctuality is strict, and Leonora is bothered by the fact that she is not permitted to smoke. Since she continues to do so in secret, another follower named Natasha exposes her. At lunch and dinner, the guide sits at the head of their table and reads the *Tales of Beelzebub*

and his Grandson by Gurdjieff, then picks out a chapter called *The Sheep and the Wolf*.

'What do you understand by a sheep and by a wolf?' he amiably enquires of Leonora.

'According to Gurdjieff, the wolf and the sheep must live together in harmony. The wolf represents the body and the sheep the emotions. Have I understood this correctly? The truth is that I find it quite impossible to believe that the wolf and the lamb will lie down together, and even more impossible that you refuse to permit me to smoke here.'

'If you succeed in giving up cigarettes, your victory will be your salvation.'

'And who told you that I wish to be saved?'

Within a few days, Leonora is growing annoyed. It has become intolerable to her that her companions in their fifties are now behaving like five-year-olds. They cry whenever they open their mouths, lamenting their lot in life.

'Sentimentalism is a form of boredom,' Leonora repeats impatiently.

It also reminds her of what Renato Leduc used to say: 'In life one has to do as one wishes, or else end up opening every other sentence with "I wish I had … I would have preferred to have …", expressions not worth a damn.'

In order to unburden herself, she tears her friends to pieces in a daily diary addressed to Remedios, in which she also makes fun of Rodney and his wife, Janet.

'If only, rather than sarcastically mock everyone else, you would follow your meditation exercises, this retreat could be of great benefit to you,' Rodney sweetly tells her, as if he could divine the content of her writing.

'I have the feeling that, wherever it is I am going, I'm still carrying a sack of rocks on my back,' answers Leonora.

'These are the rocks made by your own curse, they belong to your false personality, one that you have yet to renounce.'

'What do you mean? There's nothing in the least false about my personality!'

'That's what you think. You need to look more deeply inside yourself, recall your past history, tear off the mask to reveal your true self. Gurdjieff said: "You must make every effort to ensure that your past does not become your future."'

'There are always times, though, when no matter how hard I try the past takes possession of the present.'

'The past dies if the present cuts its throat,' Lillian Firestone announces, with her spectacles perched on the end of her nose.

At meal times, Janet serves up frugal portions. When Natasha attempts to obtain a second helping, Janet explains: 'If you eat too much you won't be able to experience the full force of cosmic energy.'

Janet insists on a policy of lights out at ten o'clock at night. 'It seems almost as if I've been sent back to the convent,' Leonora grumbles. She cannot abide Lillian Firestone and writes as much to Remedios: 'What on earth was the position of the stars at the hour of her birth? I can only believe such an imbecile must have been born back in the Stone Age.' Nor can she bear the look on Natasha's face and the banality of her smile. At every opportunity she interjects: 'I want to integrate myself with the Cosmos.' To which Leonora replies, by way of a joke, that what she wants is a catapult to get her there. The other woman showers her with thanks: 'Deep within me I know I carry my astral body. How good it is that you understand that!'

'Our life is like a series of shipwrecks, we have fled one catastrophe only to fall into another. This retreat is a life-belt. Remember what Gurdjieff tells us: "He who advances slowly goes far."'

'Then it would appear that Gurdjieff cannot be described as exactly original, since this comes straight out of one of La Fontaine's *Fables*,' Leonora answers back, in her most acid tones.

In addition to teaching them how to assume the lotus position, Rodney Collin Smith instructs them in how to breathe and to meditate. He requests that they purchase copies of his book, *The Theory of Eternal Life*, based on Ouspensky's theories. He tells them that he is currently working on *The Theory of Celestial Influence* and will give them each a copy when it is published. He also has faith in Zen Buddhism; it is the reason he requests that they remain still, their eyes lowered, paying attention to their breathing, for immobility obliges them to live in the present moment.

Later on, he initiates them into sacred dance movements and to communal ways of working, in order to unite the spirit with the body and teach the love of one's neighbour. They make their beds, sweep their cabins, and take turns to prepare their meagre meals. Rodney himself regularly appears with a broom or a dishcloth, and is often to be found crouching on the floor tiles in the kitchen, scrubbing away with a benign smile on his face, even while the sweat runs down into his eyes.

Another communicant named Georgina snaps at Natasha as she is knitting a scarf: 'Are you knitting a sweater for a cobra? And where on earth did you find such a nauseous green shade of wool?' Leonora approves of Georgina's frankness, most of all when Bible study hour comes around again:

'Everyone knows that the Bible can't be trusted. According to

Noah: “It doesn’t matter in the least to me how high the water rises as long as it doesn’t reach the wine.” So he filled the Ark with animals, got drunk, fell in the water, and his wife left him there to drown.’

‘That not right, Leonora,’ protests Natasha.

‘Of course it is, his wife was left his entire inheritance and in those days a yoke of oxen was worth more than a bank account.’

What a relief to leave such air-heads to the ministrations of their spiritual guide!

Christopher Fremantle, who also hails from Great Britain, is another guru. Remedios Varo is enthusiastic:

‘He’s a painter, just like we are. Get a move on, let’s find out what he’s made of! He was really close to Gurdjieff. He applies the master’s ideas to his painting: to him concentration is a supreme undertaking.’

Through him, the initiates discover lines they never knew existed in a flower, or a fruit, or a wooden table. When the master asks: ‘What is more important, form or colour?’ Leonora hesitates, remembering Max’s *frottages*, his *grattages*, and finally considers form to come before all else.

‘Fremantle is an exceptional being, in addition to which he is really rather handsome. Thanks to him all our palettes will be reduced to a single colour,’ sighs Leonora.

Anne Fremantle’s generosity captivates Kati, Eva and Leonora, who share their spiritual conclusions with Remedios:

‘Free yourself of every stereotypical expression, free yourself from commonplace beliefs, free yourself from clichés, free yourself from visits, free yourself of those who call themselves visionaries, or at least that’s what the two hemispheres of my brain are telling me.’

‘Lately I’ve been dreaming of a picture of a nun who winks one eye at me from the top of her tower,’ Remedios tells Leonora. ‘I think it relates to a figure in a painting from the studio of the Spanish painter Zurbarán, or maybe from one in the eighteenth century, and it is sinister and bewitching.’

‘Then paint it.’

‘I’ve already painted *Towards the Tower*. Don’t you remember?’

In addition to the bedevilled nuns of Loudun, the two artists are intrigued by the spectacle of nuns possessed by the devils of Louviers, who put the exorcist to rout. Each of the nuns is tormented by a different demon. Sister Mary of the Holy Sacrament is possessed by Putifar, Sister Anne of the Nativity by Leviathan, Sister Mary of the Child Jesus by Phaeton, Sister Elizabeth of Saint Saviour by Asmodeo. During her holidays in Manzanillo, Leonora paints them on the point of drowning: *Nunscape at Manzanillo*. Remedios, also convent-educated, applauds it:

‘Recently,’ Leonora confides in her, ‘I had a terrifying nightmare: I

am dead and obliged to bury my own corpse. As it starts to decompose, I decide to embalm it, so I order it to be paid for on arrival at my house on the Calle Chihuahua. When the coffin is delivered, I am so shocked by the sight of myself that I refuse to pay the charge and I send it back.'

'It's as if one would refuse to pay the price for a life; in the end, what a relief not to have to occupy ourselves with our own funeral preparations!' Remedios concludes.

Influenced by her readings on Gurdjieff, Remedios paints *Rupture*. The main personage is fleeing a house with six windows, and out of each there leans a face identical to her own: 'They are my multiple selves and I shed each one as I came to know myself,' she explains.

During the course of the week, Leonora encounters Fremantle again and finds him seductive.

'How do you feel about the retreat you made with my friend Rodney Collin Smith?'

'Fine, apart from the fact that my head is dancing with Tlalpan, Gurdjieff, Ouspensky and the Ten Commandments; not to mention the scanty rations awarded us at mealtimes throughout the week I've spent in the shadow of his lectures.'

'I am sure you have learnt something.'

'As of now I want to learn from you, as I am interested in your theories regarding colour. I have been told you know all about red, blue and yellow.'

On returning to the Calle Chihuahua, she calls out to her husband:

'Chiki, come out of your cave, I've prepared a delicious dinner!' Chiki obeys. 'In spite of everything, that retreat at Peña Pobre gave me a sense of peace I have never known before,' she tells Chiki.

'Let's just see how long it lasts.'

48. UNTIED IN TIME

WOLFGANG PAALEN, FINDING HIMSELF without means and on to his third marriage (this time to Isabel Marín, sister to Lupe), determines to sell off some of his prehispanic artefacts. As he can no longer cope with the dangers associated with this contraband, he turns to drugs and alcohol to reduce his anxieties. A follower of Schopenhauer, for whom the most intelligent solution is to give up on life altogether, he takes the lesson literally to heart.

Paalen commits suicide in Taxco on 24th September 1959. He selects his hotel, pays in advance, and even adds a generous tip. His final *Self-portrait* shows his face with its features faded to vanishing point, immersed in candle smoke in a technique he calls *fumage*.

'Suicides throw me completely, for to me nothing is superior to the spectacle of life,' says his patron and companion Eva Sulzer, and bursts into tears.

'How ironic. Years ago he made a pistol out of bones,' Remedios recalls. 'Breton's homage to him in his magazine, *Medium*, was a timely one.'

'I would never consider killing myself,' is Leonora's contribution. 'I am always too curious to know what might happen tomorrow.'

'Well I do at least understand those who commit suicide,' Remedios adds compassionately.

'And I don't. In the end, we spend more time dead than alive,' Leonora concludes.

'Ah well,' Alice attempts to comfort herself, 'at least he enjoyed life.'

'Was he bisexual?' Remedios asks.

'He was trisexual,' answers Eva, who knows most about it.

Eva and Alice console one another. Alice has recourse to her painting, Eva to her photography and her Swiss fortune. Both of them analyse Paalen, and take time to consider the ways of the unconscious. Their relationship with him was above all psychological. After all, both were his wives, Eva more so than Alice, since she was the strongest member of the triad.

Eva Sulzer burns with a passion for Jung and talks about him at parties. 'He is one of the greatest doctors of all time.' Remedios and Leonora recognise themselves through his interpretations of dreams.

'Jung says our dreams are a fount of self-knowledge. The lies we live by can be revealed to us in our dreams. It seems as if the unconscious is a sort of Cerberus guarding the entrance, whom we can never get past. In addition to all this, it's in no way possible to understand Surrealism without psychoanalysis.'

‘I can’t dream any more,’ Kati alleges. ‘I’m working too hard.’

At the age of twenty, Eva decided to travel to New York to undertake analysis with Jung but it was essential to book the appointment a year in advance. Thus the Swiss psychoanalyst lost the chance to know a beautiful and intelligent woman who turned every head in a room when she entered, with her own head held high. Eva, Leonora, Remedios and Alice Rahon are all obsessed, like Jung, by occult phenomena. They recount their dreams to one another. Very soon Kati, Remedios and Leonora leave the group because Alice wants to discuss the psychic origins of schizophrenia and Eva Sulzer prefers to go on about how badly Paalen behaved and how his conscience must have tormented him. A great admirer of Remedios, she longs to know what the subject of her next painting will be. Leonora keeps a hermetic silence on the subject of all her work in progress. She insists on striving for a truth that will bring her happiness. ‘I want to become a “person”, the highest form of a human being.’ Remedios, too, takes to psychoanalysis, along with her husband Walter Gruen, who in all things does as she wishes. In contrast, Chiki has no idea how to protect his wife.

‘Whatever induced the serpent to grow feathers?’ Leonora asks.

‘Ay Leonora, do leave Quetzalcoatl in peace just this once!’

‘The truth is I’m talking about a nameless force that operates on the psyche and can work miracles.’

‘Work is the best psychologist,’ Kati insists.

‘Have you never undertaken psychoanalysis?’

‘War psychoanalysed me, and now the one thing I know is that if I don’t get out of bed in the morning, no-one will do so for me.’

Eva Sulzer, the know-all, gets irritated:

‘Leonora, you go to your sessions in order not to discover yourself; most people go along just to be like everyone else, even if their conformity brings them to a type of slavery and ultimately they reach the point of destruction.’

‘I want to know myself; to find my inner truth!’ Leonora refutes her.

‘The day when that happens you’ll stop painting.’

‘The Red Queen told Alice that in order to go faster she had to run backwards.’

‘Is that what your psychoanalysis is all about?’

‘Yes, and I live it out in Clayton Green, Lancashire, on my father’s arm.’

‘What’s going on, Leonora, is that you are attemping to assume your father’s role.’ Eva Sulzer intercepts, convinced that she should be the psychoanalyst here.

‘How can I do that if I am his total antithesis?’ asks Leonora,

offended.

'You are actually quite like him: authoritarian and busily trying to ensure that everyone depends on you! Maybe that's the reason why you have always felt persecuted by him.'

'That's a lie!' yells Leonora.

Alice Rahon comes to her defence:

'Leonora's great virtue is the curiosity which crucifies her and, if we all had it too, the mysteries of the spirit would be revealed to us all.'

'I'd rather the mysteries of the digestive system were revealed to me,' responds Leonora.

'When the artist encounters himself, he is lost. Artists' sole ambition is to never confront themselves,' Alice persists.

'If you meditate for forty minutes every day, you'll be stimulating your hormones,' Leonora is quick to point out.

'What?' asks Eva, open-mouthed.

'Forgive me, I meant to say neurons,' Leonora adds, by way of an apology.

'What a Freudian slip and what a catalogue of contradictions! We are all subject to inexplicable phenomena,' Eva pronounces. 'Jung dedicated himself to alchemical philosophy and believed in divine miracles born of men and nature; thus he compared Buddha and Christ, and then finally chose to stay with the Buddha because the Christ offered himself in sacrifice and Jungian psychoanalysis finds no place for victims.'

'What I liked about Jung was that a group of Masai percussionists and dancers leapt up and down around him in Africa and he accepted that he felt afraid,' Remedios enthuses.

Every day more visitors are drawn to Leonora's door by her growing reputation. Chiki receives them and retires. At first, Leonora attempts to dissuade him from withdrawing, but no longer; he is an adult and must take responsibility for his decision to remove himself, it's not for her to intervene.

'Chiki, it looks as if your refuge is the most inhospitable room in the house.'

'I spend most of my time with all of you.'

'No, you are always off on your own in there.'

'And you isolate yourself from everyone behind your curtain of smoke. You'll end up not even able to see your sons.'

'To be frank, the one person I've no desire to see is you. It goes without saying, since what you are doing is erasing yourself from the face of the Earth.'

Chiki retreats, weighing the force of her words. Even with the passage of time he cannot forget that in a single concentration camp

the Nazis murdered over a million Jews.

'And don't read any more about those crematorium ovens. It'll make you even sicker than you are already.'

Yet Chiki cannot stop thinking about those underground chambers with their tiled walls. Nowadays, some of the concentration camps have been turned into museums in which everything is conserved, right down to the straw on the bunkbeds where the skeletons that once were humans used to lie. To him, the most moving story is that of Ilse Rosenberg, a girl who began to recite poems in the cattle truck used to transport her to the camp. A Nazi overheard her and ordered her to recite a passage from Goethe's *Faust.* In the midst of a deathly silence, Ilse recited from Goethe and the man was moved; yet not even this saved her from death in Auschwitz.

'You cannot remain locked inside this hell. Break out of it for the sake of Leonora and your sons,' Kati protests. 'Even your silence is offensive. Leonora says that days, weeks, perhaps months go by without your addressing a word to her.'

'She doesn't deserve it.'

'What you both deserve is a house filled with light. Yours resembles one of the infamous grottos of Cacahuamilpa, in Guerrero.'

'All I long for is that it should always be filled with friends,' Leonora insists.

On her return from the cinema with the boys, Chiki informs Leonora: 'Leduc called you on the phone.' The same evening Leduc appears on the doorstep with a book in his hand. It is called *Tales of Animals, Children and Ghosts* for her to illustrate. He is the same Renato as ever, only still more charming, if that were possible.

'You too look exactly the same. I also have a child, a daughter called Patricia. I'll bring her round.'

Leonora's pleasure is obvious and she invites him to dinner. Chiki takes care that no-one is in need of anything and the boys are charmed by the guest, Gaby most of all. They all discuss literature, especially Swift, Lewis Carroll and mention is even made of Mary Edgeworth, Leonora's aunt. Renato may be the only guest to have heard tell of *The Crock of Gold,* a book that Leonora has guarded like treasure ever since she was a child.

'Lewis Carroll has a lot in common with you, Leonora. For a start he was left-handed like you.'

'I'm not left-handed. I write and paint with both my hands and can also do so from right to left. And I don't stammer like him, either.'

Gaby sticks around until night is well advanced, keen to pick Leduc's brains on Mexican politics. In a fortnight Renato returns for the drawings. 'They are a total mess!' Then Gaby confesses to him that he writes poetry.

‘Me too,’ and Renato smiles.

‘My mama never told me you were a poet.’

‘Yes, indeed I am. And she even went so far as to illustrate one of my books.’

Gaby opens the book at random and starts reading.

‘To love, desiring, as I loved before
— before I knew that time is golden –
How much time I wasted, how much time.
And now I have no time to love
as once I loved, how I pine
to waste time once more.’

‘That’s not at all bad, Renato,’ Gaby tells him, from the heights of his youthful insolence.

‘Does it seem such a piece of crap to you, Gaby? And no, I don’t write poems any more.’

‘No, it’s a good sonnet, and now I’ll read you one of mine.’

Leduc is an excellent conversationalist. Gaby shows him what he is writing and follows Leduc’s suggestions.

‘Why don’t you write more poetry?’ he asks Renato.

‘Because, having spent four or five hours a day sat on my arse in front of a machine typing nonsense to earn a daily crust, there’s no longer even a passing moment during which one feels like writing love notes to the beloved. Look Gaby, to write novels, essays, plays or any form of high literature, I would need to detoxify myself from journalism and it’s what has been putting food on my table for the past thirty years. I’ve got too used to living by and through journalism.’

Gaby figures out that the editing suite, noisy with the tapping of typewriters, also constitutes a story or perhaps a novel with its own well-defined stereotypes: the liar, the opportunist, the flatterer, the careerist, the *arriviste*. ‘We make nothing at all that lasts. We don’t possess even the smallest particle of tenacity,’ Renato concludes.

From Renato’s Mexico emerge street vendors of herbal cures, porters, whores and pimps. Gaby asks which Mexico is his own. Gaby and Pablo speak French with their father and English with their mother. Gaby’s birthplace is an enigma to him — for at times he feels it to be alien, incomprehensible, even cruel, and maybe it’s Renato who holds the key to it.

Mexicans, so humble and so humiliated, are unpredictable:

‘You already took the Child Jesus of Atocha home to dress him? May I sing him a godfather’s lullaby?’ ‘I went to offer my condolences to the Virgin of Guadalupe.’ ‘Don’t forget the rum for the libations at the altar of the dead.’ ‘We’re going to celebrate my fifteen-year-old daughter’s confirmation, and I don’t care if I have to steal to pay for

it.' 'Today the Novena of Prayers is ended, and it's the feast of the Raising of the Cross.' 'There's no-one here because they've all left for the cemetery to visit their dead.' 'I want to cut off and offer up my plaits to Saint Anthony in order for him to give me a husband, even an old one.' 'Neither left nor right, but always the opposite way.' 'The local priest won my sister over with all his papal benedictions. There they are in the living room, framed in gold.' 'You need to sing *Las Mañanitas* — a birthday hymn — to the Little Virgin.'

Chiki, Gaby, Pablo and Leonora wonder why the people cling to bleeding figures of Christ in the festival processions, and why they genuflect quite so often. They make signs of the cross like insects marking their forehead, chest, shoulders and belly. The body is their individual codex. In Europe the saints wear smiles; in Mexico the suffering of martyrs and souls in purgatory is bloodcurdling.

There are times when Leonora feels as if she is always walking on an island: England? Ireland? Tenochtitlán, the Aztec capital city? Perhaps a combination of all three; a place of her own invention, where the creatures who keep her chained to her easel emerge from. Why did they drain the Lake of Texcoco? We could be happy if we only had water. How many deeds does this country commit against itself! Today all is dust. Leonora is slowly discovering Mexico; the country itself has already discovered her, and holds her fast.

The city assails her on its street corners that evoke other countries, rivers and European capitals, mountains and lakes, with their stallholders whose hands recall those of Van Gogh's *Potato Eaters.* The Federal District of Mexico City insinuates itself through each of her five senses and she sips it down as she does her daily cups of tea.

49. POETRY OUT LOUD

ALICE RAHON WEARS WRAP-AROUND SKIRTS like a Tahitian and her hair sweeps her shoulders. When she walks she leans at an angle, leaning forwards, which gives her an air of vulnerability, but also makes it all the easier to embrace her. She smiles and recites poems that on her lips sound like a bell in the night. She is never apart from Eva Sulzer and she spends many long nights with Remedios, whom Eva has taken under her wing. Alice invites Leonora and Octavio Paz to dine at her house in the literary district of San Ángel. Around the table they reach the decision that poetry should take to the streets:

'It should be declaimed in the squares, in church aisles, in the market place!' Alice Rahon is wildly gesticulating by way of emphasis. 'Mexico is pure poetry that has to break out into the streets!'

'It is essential to create a theatre of really high quality,' Octavio observes. 'Here the only interesting playwright is Usigli; we have to open ourselves up, extend bridges across the ocean. Many short pieces are totally poetic and easy to stage. I could also contribute one.'

Two days later, the poet knocks at the door on Calle Chihuahua. His eyes are as light as those of Max and the two Morales doctors. He is brilliant and warm, and loves the Surrealists, who have adopted him as one of their own.

'The University supports us in staging plays by García Lorca, the *Eclogue IV* by Juan del Encina and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Together with García Torres we are going to create *Poetry Out Loud*, I am considering translating some short works: Ionesco's *The Motor Show*; Georges Neveux's *The Canary*, and Jean Tardieu's *Oswald and Zenaida*, and I'd also like to do an adaptation of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Would you be able to do the sets?'

Those seductive blue eyes succeed in persuading Leonora to accede to his request. The poet turns up in the afternoons to talk about Djuna Barnes, Breton and Picasso, who hover over the Earth, and above all about Duchamp, whom he admires as much as he does John Cage and his music. *Readymades* are just coming into fashion in Mexico.

'It is by no more than the mere fact of selection that an artist turns a urinal into a work of art that he then baptises *The Fountain*,' protests Leonora.

'I like his way of giving art critics who reduce everything to adjectives a kick in the eye,' replies Paz.

'I've given plenty of good kickings in my time but I do know what art is. To me this seems like an attack on my faith in painting.'

‘By painting a beard and moustache on to the Mona Lisa, Duchamp opened up the possibility of her being a man,’ Paz alleges.

‘Marcel should have persisted in his career as an artist. Instead he preferred to close it down when he was only twenty-five years old.’

‘Why insist on the issue of whether he realised he was a great painter or not? To me it seems far braver to exhibit a piss-pot and sign it with the pseudonym R. Mutt! To paint moustaches and a beard on to the Mona Lisa is to desanctify painting,’ Paz insists. ‘And worse still, he wrote on the bottom of the picture: *LHOOQ, elle a chaud au cul.* In the 1920s, it was a feat for Man Ray to take Marcel’s photo dressed as a woman in a fur coat and a cloche hat, and so shine a light on his alter ego, Rrose Sélavy.’

‘Marcel is a misogynist, like the majority of Surrealists.’

‘Poetry Out Loud is producing my version of Hawthorne’s *Rappaccini’s Daughter*. In a tropical garden filled with poisonous plants grown by the doctor Rappaccini his daughter, Beatrice, is “a living flask of venom”.’

‘Max Ernst was fascinated by carnivorous insect-eating plants,’ Leonora informs him.

‘The garden is home to revelations.’

Leonora is intrigued by the concept that plants can bestow both life and death and that Paz seeks to defy logic by maintaining that to live and to die are one and the same. The venom can be transformed into an elixir. ‘My whole being began to clothe itself in green leaves. My head, instead of being a sorry machine churning out thoughts, was converted into a lake. From then on I gave up thought in favour of reflection,’ announced Beatrice’s lover. ‘Just as he puts it in his love poems, Octavio Paz yearns to lose himself in the woman — to lose himself in poetry in order to find himself, and so to be born and to die in it.’

Diego de Mesa is the most cultured among them; León Felipe turns up at rehearsals wearing his Basque beret, with his medieval cape and cane. María Luísa Mendoza yields to talent: ‘This is sublime. The Comédie-Française is nothing by comparison.’ Sometimes Carlos Fuentes accompanies Octavio Paz and hangs on his every word with devotion.

‘Why don’t we stage Ionesco’s *Exit the King*?’ suggests the young author Juan José Gurrola.

Leonora assumes responsibility for the sets and the wardrobe, and soon creating scene sets swallows up her painting; worse yet, her costumes get in the way of the actors’ movements. For Beatrice, she invents a wide white hat that the actress rejects out of hand.

‘It’s so heavy it keeps falling off. I spend my time onstage worrying more about this unwieldy contraption than over what I

ought to be saying.'

'We could trim it a little.'

Juan Soriano knows just how to phrase requests, and Leonora reduces the hat's size. He makes her laugh with his laughter and levity, and his last-minute happenings.

'I think you must be a *sidhe*, Juan.'

'Next you'll next be calling me a *chaneque*.'

'Now we are going to repeat the scene with the kiss.'

León Felipe and Diego de Mesa propose that the number of trees also be reduced.

'There's no space left on the set,' complains Hector Mendoza. 'Each time The Messenger comes on, he knocks over painted flowers and animals.'

Soriano's costumes are also a hindrance. Paz comes to his defence: 'It doesn't matter. Employing over seventeen metres of royal blue nylon is a great novelty.'

For the next spectacle, *King Balthazar's Dinner*, Leonora suggests that the audience be required to wear masks. There is not enough money to supply three hundred of them, or even enough to make all the scenery. Yet enthusiasm does not wane. The *miseen-scène* for the *Book of Good Love* by the Archpriest of Hita, with musical instruments provided by Juan Soriano, proves a triumph.

The Alatorre-Frenk family sings *Chaste Susanna* wearing sumptuous clothes made of velvet and feathers that rapidly go well over budget.

Leonora attends all the rehearsals. She meditates on her own projects and composes *Penelope* and *The Invention of Mole* in her head. She sets the Archbishop of Canterbury on to boil in a vast cauldron, under inquisition by Moctezuma. The priest bubbles away until nothing more than his head in its mitre shows over the top. His crozier awaits like a ladle attached to the cooking pot. This image galvanises her. Would the real Archbishop of Mexico, Luis María Martínez, agree to play the role? It is said that he goes about in a *strapless* cassock, blessing the capital's nightclubs.

'In any case, if I decide to cook the Pope along with a decent quantity of potatoes, someone has to help out with peeling them all,' comments Leonora, with heavy irony.

'You really are provocative, there's no doubt about it,' Juan Soriano says, amid laughter. 'In Mexico we are tacky and sentimental.'

Another young artist turns up at the doorway on Calle Chihuahua: Alejandro Jodorowsky.

'I am the Professor of Invisibility.'

Whatever operates against established orthodoxies soon finds an ally in Leonora. The young man proposes that a thousand women

dressed as female popes storm the Vatican to prevail against the Church to leave off being misogynist.

'You're quite right. The treatment we are given is preposterous.'

They share two favourite obsessions: the unconscious and the abolition of prejudice. Jodorowsky, the Chilean who like Leonora loves cats, tells her that he knows the whole pack of Marseilles tarot cards by heart because he is endowed with a golden third eye. She brings out her deck of cards and spreads it on the kitchen table.

'This tarot is a *gringo* variant invented by Rider Waite. It's no use at all to anyone other than the hippies who used to consult it in Berkeley.'

'Well, Waite's symbols have me spellbound,' says Leonora, deeply offended. 'My favourite is the moon-woman with a hyena and a dog howling at her, separated by a scorpion.'

'Just by looking at this one card I can see you are blocked by fear, erroneous thoughts and a tendency to talk nonsense.'

From his first visit onwards, Jodorowsky appears with increasing frequency. Gaby and Pablo grow used to seeing such a variety of unusual men and women come through the front door that nothing surprises them any more. Of them all, the most eccentric remains Edward James, and they have learnt to tolerate him. Alejandro introduces Leonora to Álvaro Custodio, who commissions her to design the sets for José Zorrilla's *Don Juan Tenorio*. The actress Ofelia Guilmáin is obsessed with the Spanish Civil War and brings it up at each interval. Leonora listens to her in horror. The rehearsals provide entertainment for Gaby and Pablo, who help their mother out painting masks and decorations.

'Listen Leonora, what do you think of us writing something together?' Jodorowsky suggests.

'I'd never considered co-writing. What type of thing do you have in mind?' Leonora responds.

'A Surrealist children's operetta. Can you think of a title for one?'

'What do you think of calling it "Princess Spider", in homage to the resident in my studio?'

'Princess Spider' never materialises, but instead Jodorowsky produces both *Penelope* and *The Oval Lady*.

'You need to alter the last part. The father can't end up burning Tartar, that's too cruel. You can't do that to Lucrecia.'

'That's what was done to me, Alejandro.'

'You are a lioness; your name even suggests as much in Spanish. *Leon(or)a*, the Lioness.'

'That's precisely the reason why the story has the ending it does!'

Jodorowsky pontificates on his outstanding spirituality. All the same, he devotes himself to scandal. He loves to seek out the centre of

any storm, whereas Leonora flees every camera, including Chiki's. Alejandro wants to convert her into a public figure and have everyone recognise her on the street. 'Go out in the nude, take your cue from Pita Amor,' but Leonora refuses. Christopher Fremantle taught her to concentrate, to live at one and alone with herself.

'I am now in a period of tranquillity,' she informs Chiki, who looks back at her incredulously. Jodorowsky is a bull in a china shop and, however fond Leonora may be of cattle, he plays havoc with her inner peace. Jodorowsky is sure always to be pursued by a trail of photographers.

'You have very bad habits, Alejandro. In addition to which you are over-emphatic; I detest people who over-emphasise.'

'Oh dear. Now you are going to play the aristocrat with me.'

On the other hand, Leonora feels at home during the filming of *Un alma pura*, based on a short story by Carlos Fuentes, which entertains her with its caricatures of the famous. Leonora plays Claudia-Arabella Arbenz's mother, and is directed by a fan of Klossowski, Juan José Gurrola, who displays his talent in every scene. During the hours spent sitting around, Aldo Morante, the banker and brother of the novelist Elsa Morante, talks to her about Mexican painting and his recent acquisitions of work by Francisco Corzas and two brothers, Pedro and Rafael Coronel.

'I don't know who they are,' says Leonora.

'Are you not interested in Mexican paintings?'

'I am interested in Remedios Varo and Alice Mahon.'

'And Orozco?'

'He's terrible!'

When Luis Buñuel phones to see if she would like to have a part in Alberto Isaac's film *There are no Thieves in this Town*, taken from the short story by Gabriel García Márquez — Isaac is a friend of his and a swimming champion — Leonora thinks it could be pleasant to spend the day in company with Gabriel García Márquez — with his Afro hairstyle — along with Juan Rulfo, Carlos Monsiváis, the caricaturist Abel Quezada and María Luísa Mendoza, who both praises her and makes her laugh. Buñuel explains in detail: 'You don't need to say a single word. I only need you to be seated at a café table, chatting to the rest of them.' At the last moment, the I Ching counsels her not to go.

Leonora consults the Chinese Book of Changes even to decide whether or not to accept a dinner invitation. 'Six in the third position signifies chewing on rancid dry meat and consuming something poisonous. It brings humiliation. No comeback.'

Even when she already has her mackintosh on and her umbrella in her hand, she goes back into the house to check with the I Ching as

to whether she should go out or not. Fanatical, she casts the coins and interprets its sixty-four hexagrams in order to be all the more certain of her decision.

'You complicate your life,' Chiki tells Leonora, and she grows irritated. Chiki shakes his head. 'First it was the Kabbalah, then Yoga, and now the I Ching. What will it be tomorrow?'

'You have nothing to say on the subject of the Kabbalah. It is a science purely intended for initiated and superior spirits.'

'It has something to do with the fact that I am the Jew around here.'

'Being a Jew is not enough in itself. I do not take an interest in the Kabbalah for its religiosity, Chiki, but for the way it turns me into God, able to create with a breath.'

'You have no faith in anything at all.'

'I said *to breathe* not *to believe*. I am a painter and I put my faith in creation.'

Leonora began to read the books of the Kabbalah and ended up in love with its mythology, particularly the legend of the Golem. The four letters which together compose the secret name of Yahweh are occult and the rabbi who succeeds in discerning it will be like God.

'I am going to paint a rabbi, even if he tells me that the only truth is death. I shall paint him sitting in his bath tub. Rabbis prefer to bathe rather than to shower, and take their baths with their *kipas* still on their heads. The one in my painting I shall give a *sombrero*.'

Salvador Elizondo founds *S.nob* and asks Leonora to do its cover design.

'The magazine will be a "menstrual".'

Elizondo has a certain genius, but dislikes the idea of a 'menstrual'.

Both Gaby and Pablo have had to get used to the idea that the first thing any celebrity requests on arrival in Mexico is to pay a visit to their mother. It seems quite normal for Vivien Leigh, many years after making *Gone with the Wind*, to knock on the door, wait for it to be opened, and to take tea at the kitchen table covered with its oilcloth. Leonora asks Isaac Stern if he is a urologist and he answers: 'No I am a violinist.' A moment later, Leonora is picking a fight with him: 'You are not an artist, you are merely an interpreter.' Instead of taking offence, the next day Stern presents her with a bouquet of thirty-six roses.

'We shall put these roses everywhere in the house, including the toilet. I won't have enough vases for them all.'

Pegeen, Peggy Guggenheim's daughter, discovers Acapulco on her travels and falls in love with a boatman. She decides she is going to spend the rest of her life in a swimming costume, a shot of tequila in

her hand. Peggy turns up at the house on Calle Chihuahua with the same nose as ever and her eyes popping out of her head. Leonora offers her a cup of tea in the kitchen.

'Will you come to Acapulco with me to seek out and denounce the boatman?'

'What will you denounce him for?'

'For kidnap, abuse, and for …'

'Peggy, we're in Mexico and your daughter has reached the age of majority. Thousands of young *gringa* women fetch up on the beaches of Acapulco to have their hormonal cycles set spinning by local boatmen. Pegeen is far from being the only one, and there is not a jail in the state of Guerrero with enough cells to accommodate randy boatmen.'

'In the Chinese horoscope, Leonora, you are a snake.'

'Snake or goat or dog or donkey, I am not going to go to Acapulco with you. I can recommend you a lawyer, Miguel Escobedo, the younger son of my administrator and who is an ace where money is concerned.'

Gaby and Pablo go off to an Israeli kibbutz and return slim and sunburnt.

'We learnt how to sow, to harvest and to carry loads. The countryside no longer holds any secrets for me,' Pablo boasts to his mother. 'Our working days were even longer than yours when you were cultivating your vineyards.'

The two are taking Hebrew classes and demonstrate to their mother how they can write from right to left just like her.

'But no-one else can do it with both hands, nor using both hemispheres of their brain except me.' Leonora fiercely defends her treasured personal attribute.

Leonora finds her adolescent sons' libertarian passions infuriating, and for the first time she thinks about what Harold Carrington must have had to put up with because of her. The two boys have inherited their mother's temperament, and are striving for the impossible. Living under the shadow of a giantess is a danger to them. Aged only fifteen, the older boy is already the owner of his first car. Larry Bornstein, a Jew and a passionate art fan, invites the Weisz-Carrington brothers to come over and get to know New Orleans. Larry owns a restaurant there where five Blacks play jazz.

Gaby says that New Orleans is fabulously beautiful. The food — a combination of French and African — is sheer delight. Bornstein offers to put them up whenever they want to come over.

Gaby is intrigued by the circus, that human parody where everything is possible: sad clowns, pregnant trapeze artistes, elephants with their portable showers, women cut in half who are joined up

again at the end, to raise high their top hats. The circus people are subjects of the Red Queen, who could never demand 'Off with their heads!' because they already have their throats slit.

The world of elephant men, women covered in black hair and talking tortoises is more real and attractive to Gaby than university. He is both director and actor, appearing disguised as a dog. María Félix, whose portrait Leonora is currently painting, attends as a spectator. She enjoys coming round to eat with Juan Soriano and is always laughing. On one particular night Leonora explains that the plight of circus animals causes her great suffering:

'Most of all the little ponies with the Amazons on their backs.'

'But Amazons are strong women, aren't you worried that they might fall off?' enquires María Félix in her sergeant major's voice.

Like Leonora, María Félix is drawn to the arts of prophecy and she assumes the lotus position in her Chanel trousers. Leonora tells her of Zoroaster, and reads her horoscope for her. Leonora's house is the home of premonitions. María wants to learn what her future has in store, and holds out her hand for Leonora to tell whether her lines of destiny are favourable or not. They are Apollo, Saturn and Mercury. 'Haven't you ever seen a Celtic tarot? In the major Arcana, the Beloved is the most beautiful of all. These two women, one blonde and the other with blue hair, are you and I. The man in the middle is Cupid.' María Félix applauds when the card of the Sun is drawn, but Leonora informs her that the Sun can also lead to loneliness, a lack of friends, divorce or lost love.

When her chauffeur comes to collect her, Leonora begs María Félix:

'Please stay a little longer, for the better I know you, the better I shall paint you.'

The film actress sits herself back down on the floor again.

Both women are born under the sign of Aries; their elements are fire and wood.

'When were you born, María?'

'That's not something to be revealed to anybody!'

'I was born on the 6th of April 1917 and I am a snake. I would guess that you are a tiger.'

'I adore snakes, but if you ever reveal the date of my birth, I'll go for you. It was the 8th of April fifty-four years ago.'

'Then our planet is Mars and our colour is red; we are also passionate, intelligent and restless.'

'Alex gave me a tiger of 277 carat diamonds which he had made to order at Hermes.'

'Neither of us are faithful women,' responds Leonora with intentional irony.

The telephone never stops ringing: ‘Ma, I’m coming over now.’ ‘Ma, I’ll see you tonight.’ ‘I’ve no idea what time I’ll be home.’ ‘It’s a really important meeting.’ ‘I’ve got something else I must do, I can’t go there with you, Ma.’ The boys have set themselves free, they are extremely sought-after, young women in love with them turn up at all hours.

‘Ma, aren’t you pleased that young female students find me so attractive?’ asks Pablo.

‘But you’re both still children yourselves!’ protests Leonora in surprise.

‘Enough of that children stuff. We’re young men now.’

‘Chiki, I want to run time backwards so our children can be caterpillars again.’

‘That’s one thing which shall never happen. Every day from now on they’ll fly further afield.’

‘How horrible!’

‘It doesn’t seem horrible to me at all, it seems normal. They have their own lives to lead, as you have led your own.’

‘Chiki, there are still so many things I need to do.’

Leonora is agonised by the suspicion that her life is not right for her; it might be better if she were living in England; all her paintings indicate as much; but her sons have been born and raised in Mexico. How could they all move at this point in time? Most likely over there, in that great British Empire, nobody will remember her, not even her maternal family, since according to the Moorheads she is nothing more than the Carrington cousin who lost her mind.

Here in Mexico she has Remedios, among her other loves. It could well be that her version of Hazelwood is already a world of the imagination, a dream that in reality already crumbled to dust years ago.

‘Would either of you like to go and live in Europe?’

‘Ma, going to live in England is not going to resolve the problem of your depressions. In any case, your agonies are your allies, they are what keep you painting,’ Pablo advises her. He is intending to train as a doctor.

‘So now it turns out that you who were my pupils have become my teachers!’ says Leonora, and laughs out loud.

Leonora designs a rug that is to be woven by an artisan in Chiconcuac in the State of Mexico.

‘How good it is to have you here among us, little miss. Every line you draw is like a vein leading to the heart.’

‘What does Chiconcuac mean?’ asks Leonora.

‘“Inside the serpent with the seven heads”, little miss.’

Leonora smiles at the artisan with affection.

In a series of three rugs she calls *The Snakes,* a snake is shown coiled around a shrub that could well be a marijuana plant. It has a golden bough and in it Leonora conjures up her Celtic origins and references Frazer's *Golden Bough* as well as Graves' *The White Goddess,* books that revert to their roots in the tales told by Grandmother Moorhead. She always assured her that the family was descended from the fairies of Tuatha Dé Danann, who live below the green hills.

On the 4th of August 1963, the group is hit by some terrible news. José Horna, the life and soul of every party, who never returned to his native Andalucia, dies of a heart attack in the Spanish Sanatorium, at the age of forty-nine. They hold a wake for him right there, and the wreaths of flowers are laid out in the garden where sheep graze, and who come over and start nibbling them.

'José would have enjoyed that,' Kati says with resignation.

Leonora spends the entire night with Kati and Norah, all of them inconsolable. José had helped them to love life.

'José always promised me that we would "be a couple of happily married old people", and he let me down.'

Kati ages ten years in a single night and withers. Norah, the sceptic, blossoms.

50. NA BOLOM

FOR LEONORA, IT IS THRILLING to keep company with Ignacio Bernal in his discovery of a still largely buried Mexico. The director of the National Museum of Anthropology, Bernal, teaches her that, in order to reconstruct a culture, the most important objects are those that belong to daily life, and he assembles them with care.

'No-one seems to appreciate the true value of it all. This material could reveal everything about who we once were to us.'

They clean the pots with the finest of brushes, in order to remove the earth and to conserve the knowledge they may hold. When Bernal's assistant, Santiago Luna, bangs a box down on the floor and levers it open to see what's inside, Bernal is clearly annoyed:

'We are on the point of examining an object which runs the risk of breaking under pressure: only ever use a flat brush or a paintbrush.'

He holds out a small vase to Leonora: 'Take it in both hands. It's a unique piece.'

Whenever the archaeologist notices raised patches on the grass, he pauses.

'Hold on a moment, there could be a tomb underneath here.'

'I am walking over a drum,' Leonora affirms.

'Why don't we insert a rod and see what we find?' Santiago Luna proposes. 'Pound the ground and if it sounds hollow, it means there must be a cavity underneath it. That makes it more likely we'll uncover a tomb there.'

On seeing how moved Leonora is, Ignacio Bernal proposes that she paints a picture of the world of the Maya for the National Museum of Anthropology.

'Your mural will be opposite Rufino Tamayo's.'

The only thing Leonora knows about the Maya is that they were astronomers, and the most cultured and resourceful of all the meso-americans:

'First of all, I need to get to know the Maya.'

'Itzamna could be syncretised with the Jewish Yahweh.'

'I have never painted anything nearly as big as a mural before.'

'Gertrude Duby has a house called Na Bolom down in San Cristóbal. She will receive you there.'

The journey to Chiapas turns out to be utterly exhausting. The road twists and turns, the asphalt over-heats as much as the car does, but the grandeur of the countryside affords compensations. Water springs forth on all sides. Suddenly, when it is time to make the climb from Tuxtla to San Cristóbal, a red shape appears near the roots of a tree in the midst of the leafy forest. It is a woman, her shoulders

covered by a blanket which ignites the woodland with its brilliant colour. Yet who is this apparition? The red moves and dances beneath the crown of foliage. The forest sings. The woman is walking with a plank of wood across her shoulders; her *quexquemetl* shawl lights up the green horizon. An extraordinary tree extends its branches like wings.

'What type of tree is this?'

'It's a silk cotton tree,' says the driver.

Leonora inhales deeply, her emotions rising like a pair of doves fluttering in her throat. On raising her eyes, she observes tigers in the skies and, on lowering them again, the most astonishing colours assail her:

'If I don't learn to give up smoking here, I'll never manage to do so for the rest of my life,' she admits to Trudi, her host, and wife to Frans 'Pancho' Blom.

Gertrude Duby Blom, Swiss in origin, likewise came to Mexico in flight from the war. The Lacandons call her Trudi.

'I knew nothing at all about Mexico before coming here, only that the Aztecs cut out human hearts. Here I learnt that shoot-outs soon superseded human sacrifice.'

They go on foot along unpaved streets, out to the red earth of Cuxtitali. The people of Chamula give way to them; the women wrapped in their shawls barely look up and only approach when they recognise Trudi. They carry with them a scent of burnt wood, smoke and copal resin. The odours of their cultivated plots of earth accompany them into their houses.

'Watch out when you walk through the rows of produce. Be careful not to step on the pumpkin shoots, or trample the shoots of maize.'

Numerous beggars gather in the church porches, their half-shut eyes blinking through a filmy mist.

'The hooch they sell them here is lethal,' Trudi tells her.

Leonora loves to hear the noise of hooves on the cobbles, and sees how the horses are tethered to a hoop buried in the wall. When Trudi tells her the tale of a spellbound steed, she longs to see him. At the far end of a pasture, a horse is protesting at the lashes of his owner:

'The lash is made specifically for animals who have been bewitched.'

Then, to the surprise of all present, Leonora approaches the creature and holds out her arm. The horse lowers his head and she places the flat of her palm over his eyes, calming him instantly.

'How did you manage to do that?'

'I spoke to him in his own language. I speak in Horse. Now I would like to give him a lump of sugar.'

Trudi insists that she has swum across reservoirs and ponds infested with crocodiles and emerged without as much as a scratch on her skin. According to her, far worse things happen in the holiday resort of Acapulco than in the rain forests of the Lacandon. The greatest danger comes from the wild boar. When a herd of fifty or a hundred wild boar follow a bold, aggressive leader, the only remedy is to clamber up into the trees along with the howler monkeys and marmosets. Another real danger is that a tree falls on to the camp, in which case there's no means of avoiding being crushed.

'I walked for seven months through the rain with Frans. Everything got mildew: fabric, film, clothing and food. The forests made us feel ill all the time.'

'Trudi, I am so hungry,' Leonora tells her, in order to change the subject from that of the overwhelming hazards.

'Ah, how good you mention that now. I hope you'll eat howler monkey, marmoset, pheasant, venison, corn *tamales*, grasshopper soup, maize and maize and lots more maize, because that's all there is. What you're doubtless going to take especial delight in are my tomatoes, which I sowed myself. I've got a university degree in horticulture, you know.'

'Don't worry about that, I eat whatever I am given. Do you happen to have tea?'

'Of course I have tea. How English you are!'

At night the cold rushes down from the mountains and the celestial dome fills up with stars.

'Do you have a balcony from where I can observe the skies?'

'All San Cristóbal is an observatory.'

'To have a telescope without its essential complement, a microscope, is a sign of the most obtuse incomprehension. The task of the right eye is to stare through the telescope, while the left eye peers down the microscope.'

'Frans gave our microscope away to the school.'

'This biting cold reminds me of my childhood.'

Leonora locks herself away for several days to decipher copies of Maya codices in the manner of Brother Bartolomé de las Casas, the sixteenth-century monk who respected and defended the indigenous peoples of Mexico. She tries to read, but the forest distracts her. She could spend an eternity watching the trees extend their branches to embrace the rain's assault, cascading down on them for hours on end.

'Are you afraid of thunder?'

'Did you see that flash of lightning?' interrupts Trudi. 'The Maya used to believe that its zigzag was a silver snake slithering across the sky in the course of the storm. The snake sent its light down to Earth in bolts of lightning and so it was that men and animals were created.'

‘What is a *nahual*?’

‘It’s the small creature that protects each of us, your double in the shape of an animal. What do you think your *nahual* would be, Leonora?’

‘A horse. And yours?’

‘A squirrel. Although the shaman, wizard and healer, Pasakwala Komes, calls me a goat.’

Trudi walks back and forth, on and on, without the least sign of tiredness. Her energy intrigues Leonora. Where does she dredge it up from?

‘I think that with all this walking I must have circled the Earth three times over. What about you, Leonora?’

‘Me? At least five circuits around the planet. I’ve walked further than the Wandering Jew.’

Leonora is inexhaustible, but Trudi beats her hands down. She interrupts her quiet time in the library by bursting in and infuriating her with her litanies of bad news concerning the Lacandon jungle.

‘I want this shameless government to turn the forest into a National Park with the assistance of Chan K’in Viejo, and I really believe I am going to win this one.’

Chan K’in is like a mysterious phantom, with his long hair and eyes that always look askance. Barefoot and clothed only in a tunic that once upon a time was white, Chan K’in comes to Na Bolom and noses around the house. If anyone approaches him, he gives them the shivers. The Lacandons remind Leonora of the *sidhes*, they hide behind trees and live deep in the forest.

‘Do the Lacandons accept you, Trudi?’

‘Yes, because on every one of our expeditions Frans and I brought them medicines, axes, machetes. Even now, three Lacandons are waiting for me to cure their illnesses back at Na Bolom. I am taken aback by their intelligence. They learnt good table manners in the space of a couple of weeks. They now bathe in my bath tub, and when they smoke they use the ashtrays.’

In San Cristóbal, the young are kind to the elderly. Sensitive to the fact that as they age they lose their sight, they lick their eyelids clean, masticate their food before inserting it into their mouths, and always invite them to share their *pozol*, a maize and vegetable stew. In so doing, they repay some of the care they themselves received during their childhoods.

The small, slender Lacandons, with their dark curtain of hair, emerge from the rain forest and head for the Blom house, where they suddenly appear in the garden, calling for Trudi.

‘My wife woke up feeling ill today. Come quickly.’

Trudi cures flu and colds, binds wounds, provides food, and

imposes her authority. Leonora hires a bicycle and potters about like everyone else in San Cristóbal. She comes and goes through the streets and wins the sympathy of the local people. The women, some of them scarcely more than children themselves, already often carry babies on their backs, and offer her their embroideries. Every step provides a fresh encounter with their extreme poverty, but also with their magic: their clothes and their hats strung with a thousand ribbons are a fiesta in themselves.

The blonde woman Ambar Past relates how

'There once was a man who fell in love with a woman in the forest.

He had to go away and decided to leave her pregnant, so she would remember that he loved her.

When he returned, there were so many women and all of them pregnant.

He no longer knew which one was his.'

Leonora's notes fill up her exercise book.

'Would you like to meet Tonik Nibak, the healer? We'll take you to see her,' Pasakwala tells Leonora.

In a wooden house with a tiled roof, Pasakwala tells her that 'as long as words exist, nothing shall be forgotten, for only thanks to words do we retain memory and if memory exists, I exist.'

'Do you think that I exist, Pasakwala?'

'I don't know. All I know is that there is a great need for you.'

Leonora reaches the hut where Tonik lives — a stooped old woman with rheumy eyes — and she is received with suspicion. Tonik performs a cleansing on Leonora, using herbs and copal, and tells her that at night the forces of death emerge from the underworld and one needs to be forewarned against them. Leonora tells her that almost every night she dreams of a ferment of ants:

'Do you cross yourself before you go to sleep? Your dream signifies that a horde of envious people are persecuting you.'

'So what do I do to make the dream disappear?'

'You die.'

'Am I about to die?'

'On the contrary, you will live to be very old indeed, probably at least to a hundred or more years.'

The shaman offers her *pozol* in a calabash mug: 'What is this?'

'Don't turn your nose up at it, drink it,' Trudi commands her. 'It's a drink made with maize, water and cacao.'

'I adore cacao. It's delicious.'

Leonora and her bicycle become a familiar sight in San Cristóbal.

'Why don't you draw us a silk cotton tree?' Pasakwala Komes asks, when Leonora requests that she recount the story of Xolotl.

‘Xolotl was a god capable of transforming himself into numerous doubles, with the intention of not dying until he had accomplished his final stage of transformation. The sun needed the blood of the gods, and when Xolotl fled away, he was turned into a monstrous fish.’

Chatting with Pasakwala, Josefa and Chica reveals a world similar that of the *sidhes* to Leonora. María Tzu celebrates a rainbow with a poem:

‘The rainbow is biting me, Kajval.
Now it is staring at me.
It is pursuing me.
And it enters my house.
Take it, chase it away from me. Get away from here!
Throw three stones at it.
Spit three plugs of tobacco at it.
This Mother of Evil/is eating my heart out.
It wants to send me away.
It wants to start a fight with me.’

‘It rains so hard here in Chiapas, the region must truly belong to the rain god, Tlaloc,’ Leonora jokes.

‘In Chiapas, all who meet their death by drowning are his chosen ones, destined to inhabit Tlaloc’s own paradise.’

The great boulders in the river remind Leonora of the ones at St. Martin d’Ardèche.

An animal’s howl interrupts the sound of the water.

‘It is the *saraguato,* the howler monkey. You can hear it from as far as eight kilometres away.’

Leonora is not interested in reproducing images of markets, or landscapes, volcanoes, huts, churches or pyramids; not even of street scenes. She paints, as always, her inner world. ‘Reason needs to know the heart’s reason, and all the other reasons as well.’

‘You do well to choose the rainbow as a subject for your mural,’ Trudi approves. ‘In Chiapas the rainbow is a subject of veneration.’

‘To tell you the truth, the most important god to me is Quetzalcoatl. Is there a zoo here?’

At the zoo, Leonora sketches tortoises and pheasants, and transforms the wild boars into hedgehogs, reminiscent of the images Max made in St. Martin d’Ardèche. The gazelles become centaurs and the lions have snakes’ tongues. Fish have teeth and vipers mutate into a mattress and dance in front of Adam, before winding themselves around the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

However much she is drawn by Mexican customs, they do not run in her blood, and her sketches for the mural illustrate her personal history. The churches with their belfries, the Cathedral of San Cristóbal with its cloister; so it is *The Magical World of the Maya*

becomes fused with the magical world of the Celts.

'It's the first time I have ever painted something as large as this,' she tells Trudi as she shows her the sketchbook.

'Don't be afraid, you won't be left on the margins; remember the spell conjured up by Jwana Krus Posol who offered a cleansing for Ambar Past:

'I shall strike your face with a mattock, O sacred Earth.
I shall enter your body.
I shall bury your holy body.
I shall enter your flesh.
I shall seed my garden plot there.
I shall sow my labour.'

Back in Mexico City, Leonora decides to go to the hairdresser. At the same time she decides to divide her mural into three. On the far left, in the 'world below', she paints a huge jaguar head, and on the right, a silk cotton tree. In the central 'earthly world', the most salient feature is a white horse, larger than life. The *chamulas*, the peasants of Chiapas, she paints very small indeed. A sun and a moon illumine the sky, across which a winged snake is flying. On the earth tapirs, vultures, leopards and spider monkeys multiply. As she paints, Leonora recites the prophecy in the Maya creation myth, the *Popol Vuh*: 'From the breast of darkness will be born the light that shall allow us to see what surrounds us.'

These are days filled with fervour. It is as if Leonora is working to the beat of an inner marimba, whose music hurries her on. 'I want to be able to paint the sound of thudding wood.' As in San Cristóbal she smoked one cigarette after the next to keep the mosquitoes at bay, now she deposits a volcano of butts beside her easel.

51. THE MAGICAL WORLD OF DEATH

ONCE SHE HAS COMPLETED THE MURAL, Leonora goes on to paint *Dolphin Conference; Rarvarok; Alchimia Avium* and *Song of Gomorrah.*

'They asked me to paint a mural by the entrance to a hospital,' Remedios tells her. 'I got scared and gave up on the idea.'

She shows Leonora the recently finished *Still Life Resuscitating* and *Music of the Forest*, still awaiting completion on her easel: 'In this one, I feel that I am on the point of representing the union between man, nature and the Cosmos, Leonora.'

It is now the afternoon of 8th October 1963, and Leonora is drinking tea in the kitchen, when a furious ringing at the door summons her attention.

'Why are you ringing like that? You frighten me.'

She wants to laugh, but the expression on Kati's face pulls her up short:

'I have some bad news for you,' Kati says, her voice shaking.

'What's up with you? You look as if you've just seen the devil. Come in and have a cup of tea.'

'Leonora, it's terrible news. Better for you to sit down.'

'And better for you to tell me what it's all about. What news can be so bad to cause you to lean on the bell like this?'

Leonora remains upright, standing on the threshold. Kati sits down and wrings her hands as if she were rinsing an invisible and slippery cloth.

'The maid ran all the way to the Sala Margolín to tell Walter, but he arrived home too late.'

'Too late for what?'

'Too late to be able to do anything, Leonora.'

'I don't understand what you're telling me, Kati.'

'Remedios died this afternoon. She went upstairs for a rest after lunch, because she was feeling a little strange. It seems as if she suffered a heart attack.'

Kati's words appear so absurd to Leonora that she cannot assimilate them. So she sips her tea, and picks up another cigarette and acts as if nothing has happened. She goes to her room without a word, takes one of the dolls she keeps there and starts sewing a brightly coloured skirt on to her, then puts the doll in a blanket and wraps her up tightly. She wants to clear the bed in order to lie her down on it, and throws sheets, pillows and the bedspread on to the floor. From downstairs she can hear Kati's voice floating up: 'Leonora, I have to go and let Alice know,' and the front door slams.

To cap it all, she is on her own, it's a school day: Chiki has gone out to take photos, and there is no-one there to keep her under control. When her husband returns, he finds her so devastated that in the end he decides that the only thing to do is for them to go and find Walter Gruen.

In the corner of the room where the wake is being held, Kati, Eva Sulzer and the maid are all in tears. Leonora cannot cry. Everyone else present looks on uncomprehendingly. Walter receives them without seeing them, hugs them as if in a blur. Nothing worse could possibly have happened to him, none of the employees in the Sala Margolín dare to look him in the eye. This strong man who survived a concentration camp through his powers of resistance is now falling apart. He blocks his ears and goes outdoors for a breath of fresh air.

'The Mexicans are right: October moons are the best,' Leonora tells Chiki, who is also gazing at the astral vault.

'Calm down, you're chain-smoking again.'

Leonora pays no attention, since she no longer hears even what she is saying to herself. She closes herself off inside her inner cell, and remembers the day when Remedios told her that they were like the fox and the Little Prince: 'And when the hour came to depart: "Ah!" said the fox. "Now I shall cry."' Leonora chews over every word in a rage. Chiki regards her with a weary look: all at once, he feels an infinite compassion for this woman who smokes so desperately. She is doubled over like an old crone, curled up in a ball, and hides her face on her knees, from where emanates a near-inaudible voice imploring: 'Can someone tell all these people to stop crying?'

In the morning they take Remedios' body to be buried in the cemetery garden, barely thirty metres away from the tomb of her close friend José Horna.

'They will keep one another company,' murmurs Kati, more tired than ever.

Leonora takes refuge in her studio. She paints *The Burial of the Patriarchs*: one figure holds up a crozier bearing the image of Hermes, who transports the souls of the patriarchs to eternal life in a canoe. She reads *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* by Frances Yates, and paints *The Burning of Bruno*. She admires the philosopher's challenge: 'There is no need to seek for divinity outside of ourselves.' For this the Inquisition brought him to judgement, declared him a heretic and consigned him to the flames.

Leonora completes her paintings and continues to write *The Hearing Trumpet*. Her main character, the ninety-two-year-old Marian Leatherby, is confined to an old people's home. She exclaims: 'At times I feel like Joan of Arc, so frighteningly misunderstood. And I often feel as if I'm being burned on a pyre merely for being so

different to all the others.'

'I am her,' thinks Leonora. Who could have understood her? 'Only Remedios, Remedios would have understood me.'

Chiki no longer knows what to do. Leonora cries out aloud at night. The death of her friend causes her to revert all the more strongly to her old acquaintance: anguish.

In the course of the following days, as if she were sent by the *sidhes*, Laurette Séjourné, Victor Serge's widow, calls her to ask if she wouldn't agree to publish the sketches for her mural in a book of the same name: *The Magical World of the Maya.* Leonora agrees. She feels comfortable with this woman who speaks to her in French and in such tones of persuasion. Laurette is also interested in the occult, the pre-Colombian stones speak to her: at the pyramids of Teotihuacan, she enters into a dialogue with the gods. She relates that what is above is also below; the stars continue in their path across the wide Earth. She deciphers signs, and comprehends even the silences of the stones. Leonora listens to her reverentially; she tells her there is no trace whatsoever of love in any of these Mexican gods, they harbour their vengefulness, and take retribution on every supposed offence. They are there to tear out human hearts with an obsidian knife.

Laurette recounts a legend to her in her silky voice:

'The birds were fighting to establish who was the most important. The Great Spirit gathered together an assembly to select the one most worthy to govern them all.

'"Surely they will choose the bird with the sweetest song," said the nightingale.

'"You're wrong about that," responded the eagle, "whoever governs needs to be strong."

'"I should be elected, my career is impeccable, my plumage is scarlet and all who see marvel at it," added the cardinal bird.

'Dzul Cutz, whose feathers were ugly, asked the Puhuy bird to lend him his plumage in return for sharing the riches and honours of winning with him.

'Puhuy gave him his feathers and the Great Spirit named the Peacock king of the birds. Once crowned, Dzul Cutz soon forgot about returning the plumage. The Great Spirit decided that whenever Dzul Cutz fanned his magnificent tail feathers, he would emit a tiny squeak from his beak that would make anyone who witnessed it burst out laughing.'

'What you're telling me here sounds like the history of power politics. Am I right?'

'Yes, that's it.'

52. OF LOVE

LEONORA'S ATTENTION IS CAUGHT by the way Álvaro looks at her, as he holds a whisky in his left hand and observes her where she stands in the drawing room of the British Embassy.

'You are the most beautiful woman at the party.'

'So I have been told thousands of times.'

From then on, Álvaro's face shines with a metallic purity and he looks in such a way that Leonora opens up to him without a second thought:

'I believe that yes, you are the person who can love me as I want to be loved.'

Without further ado, he responds with: 'Yes, I am that man.'

In an instant, Leonora's life is transformed. The laws of physics are altered when he leans his face close to hers: so daring, so handsome. Leonora is invaded by a sense of anticipation that makes her giddy.

'I have a premonition.'

'What is it?' he asks, anxiously.

'It's one of loss.'

The British ambassador announces that it is time to proceed to table. Seats have been assigned with place cards: Leonora has been seated to the right of the host. At the other end of the table she sees other women's heads turn in her direction: women wearing make-up, with lustrous hair and painted nails, all fabricated by beauty salons. Women who know how to love themselves according to the advice of fashion magazines.

'He is a great surgeon,' the ambassador tells her. 'Álvaro Lupi has saved many lives in his time.'

By the time the coffee comes round, she has learnt that Álvaro has conducted experiments with peyote, with hallucinogenic drugs, and she asks him about psilocybin.

'I received a revelation: I stretched out my neck, lifted my arms, and launched myself to dance just like Fred Astaire. I dominated all sense of space, distance and air. It went so far that when I sat down, my hands went on moving to the sound of the music, and the play of light between my fingers caused me to fall into an ecstatic trance.'

Leonora listens, holding her breath all the while.

'You have a pre-Raphaelite profile,' he tells her.

'I am pleased you think so.'

Leonora agrees to a date in Chapultepec Park.

'One can think better beneath the trees. We'll meet there at four o'clock on the Calzada de los Poetas, the Poets' Carriageway.'

Álvaro cancels appointments. It is years since he has been to the woods of Chapultepec. Finding the right road is easy. He watches her advance towards him, dressed all in black, a mackintosh floating around her as if lifting off in time with her long rhythmical steps. She walks towards him without the least hint of coquetry, as if she were a boy, with ungainly steps. Her movements resemble the decisions that Álvaro is soon to learn all about.

'That's the reason she's a painter,' he thinks. In her, every move has its own light. Suddenly they move into darkness, and the next moment they light up. To him, she is absorbing and reflecting them back at one and the same time. When she's displeased, his mood turns black; if she smiles, he shines.

Leonora traces circles on the ground as they walk along. Álvaro wants to know why, and she replies that otherwise malign spirits might carry them off through the air.

'Don't you take any exercise, Álvaro? I find that all sorts of problems resolve themselves if I meditate on them during a good long walk.'

Álvaro stumbles.

Then Leonora launches in: 'Beneath where we now are lies another Chapultepec with its lake and its pine trees growing inside it, its grass and its stones still more beautiful than those we can see here, even its castle with a fine covered balcony from where you can see the flying Angel on Independence Avenue.'

Leonora pauses under a sunbeam which immediately illuminates her.

'Move your hands around as you did on the night of our first dinner, Álvaro. That will return you to the same state of ecstasy you experienced on psilocybin.'

'I have no need to return, for I have never left that state behind.'

Leonora creates a state of disquiet around herself. Leaves shiver and assume forms he has never seen before, approaching closer to them, scratching them. Even the slimmest sapling can fall on them.

'There's no such thing as a tree without a personality,' she assures him. 'Anything that breathes is a thing of beauty. Once dead, it is fit only to be thrown in the bin. So many things I have loved have ended up in the rubbish.'

'What kind of things?'

'Men!' and she kicks a stone in her path.

Álvaro takes her hand and is surprised by how tiny it is.

'Come, I would like to take you for a drink, a coffee, whatever you feel like.'

'At Sanborn's? That's the place I like best.' She beams with reassurance and continues smiling when they reach the bar. As she

drinks, her cheeks start glowing. ‘I want you to come and meet two of my friends; one is called Pedro Friedeberg, the other Bridget Tichenor. They own a marvellous de Chirico.’

While Álvaro parks his car at the corner of Monterrey and Chihuahua streets, she bounds out with a single leap and declares, as she shuts the car door:

‘I amaze people. I have entered into your body without you even noticing.’

They resume their walks among the Montezuma cypresses. One afternoon, Leonora shows him a particular tree with dark branches raised high up to the skies, then shuts her eyes and keeps them tightly sealed while she tells him:

‘To me you have all the solidity of this tree.’

Álvaro holds a pearl necklace out to her and she looks at it for a long time.

‘Do you know something? Your present moves me because pearls are seekers after truth. That is why they are born, live and grow inside a shell; they yearn to be essential. With this necklace you have placed in my hands the instrument through which I can attain the truth.’

‘Such solemnities!’ says Álvaro with a smile.

Leonora flies into a rage.

Álvaro is surprised by how fragile Leonora’s artist friends are. Even Bridget Tichenor, who has such a constant circle of friends around her, is in need of the approval of others; not to mention Pedro Friedeberg, whose vocation seems to be one of continually pleasing others with his ingenuity and disguises. Like frightened birds, they follow newspaper columns that tremble as they hold them. ‘Here they’re saying something nasty about me.’ They are offended if there is a party they are not invited to; if they come out badly in a photograph, or do not appear at all; if Margarita Nelken or Jorge Juan Crespo de la Serna do not return their phone calls. ‘Nobody told me about this.’ They attribute their failures to the way in which the Fine Arts Institute is run. And they hide if a crowd fails to show up for their talks, when Carlos Fuentes gives a lecture, even Tongolele and Padre Partinas, albeit now without his cassock, always appear. The drama can be colossal. ‘They boycott me, they loathe me, I want to go and live in another country, poor Mexico, art is denied here.’

In the final analysis, the person who holds the strongest views is Leonora when she defends, in the name of her art, her right to demand that the world be transformed. ‘I have proved that Mexicans lack any kind of a voice in public affairs; here strength is always on the side of the ruler, not with the ruled. Why do we submit ourselves to such rulers?’ Álvaro is always delighted by the face she pulls whenever she angrily announces: ‘I loathe all political parties.’

The day when Álvaro acquires a small flat on the corner of Roma and Liverpool streets, he reveals his love to her. Leonora has known the vitality of passion and enchantment before, but never this everyday feeling that every morning is reborn anew. She has known obsession, her great dependence on Max, Renato and then Chiki. Yet the love of couples on a level with the poet López Velarde, of whom Octavio Paz spoke, is something wholly new to her. Love disrupts established values, hurls one into the unknown. André Breton, he of *l'amour fou*, would be well satisfied by her discovery, and by her beauty, on which so many around her are now commenting. 'Never have you looked so lovely,' she is told, in recognition of the energy that gives the truth to love. Only now does she remember something that Breton once said to Jacqueline Lamba: 'You are scandalously beautiful.' Thanks to Álvaro, Leonora now feels like 'the omnipotent ruler of the world'.

She moves an easel, canvas and a box of paints in to the flat.

To remake a life is to unmake the past. The more Leonora talks of what she has lived, the more certain Álvaro becomes that only extreme pain could have led to her madness. As she recounts her story, Leonora also lifts both hands first to her breast, then touches her stomach, as if her heart and then her guts were about to fall out:

'I gave him all that I was, I submerged myself in him and then had to tear myself away so brutally that a life I had scarcely started broke up and me with it: every synapse in my brain short-circuited and they gave me electro-convulsive therapy in order to try and connect them up again. Do you know what Cardiazol is? It is a form of shock therapy when they inject you with such a high dose of insulin that you end up in a comatose state. The truth is, they kill you. They call it a cure for schizophrenia, but Cardiazol really kills off all there is inside of you. The agony of what they did to me I still carry here, and here …' and she places her hand on her heart and then on her head.

Álvaro looks at her with a degree of respect he has not felt for anyone in a long time. Someone capable of suffering for love to such a degree of intensity has to be exceptional. 'It would be easy to fall on one's knees before a woman like this.'

Leonora possesses powers that render her capable of leading you even over the precipice; she is the light, the true flower of dawn. She comes from a limitless infinity; she was lost and redis-covered herself; abandoned her body and now radiates a light, an energy, a halo he recognises. 'Walter Benjamin committed suicide, even after all he succeeded in achieving by crossing the whole of the Pyrenees on foot carrying his manuscript with him; if he had waited only a little while he would have been saved; one always has to keep hope alive,' is what Álvaro thinks. This is why the sensation of something ancient and

unknown that Leonora is capable of provoking always wins the day. When she says: 'Phenomena exist which escape reason — they are those I am most familiar with,' he believes her.

'I know that stars are men, women and children who died long ago. They compose interstellar material.'

'We are a part of that too,' rejoins Álvaro, yielding.

Leaving town at weekends becomes routine for the two of them. Leonora's sons are grown and Chiki has nothing to say on the matter. Perhaps Leonora's true and terrible journey through madness shakes Álvaro. One evening in Sanborn's a waiter overturns a trolley full of dishes and the painter leaps to her feet and shouts: 'We're leaving now, this minute!'

When once Álvaro refused invitations to conferences in the provinces, he now accepts and selects one in Necaxa. The humid winds of the Gulf state hurtle across the zone, and ferny woods grow among the waterfalls. At the bottom of the valley, in a village surrounded by trees, they are welcomed at a modest hotel called Villa Juárez. They walk for hours without growing tired, and everything becomes one with the woodland — conversation and laughter, tortillas and rice, caresses and love. At times, they have arguments. Álvaro is pragmatic and Leonora follows her instincts which lead her towards nature; seeds can arrive here from as far as the Andes, brought by a current in the atmosphere and bearing toxic substances of which only she is aware.

'Toxic?'

'Yes, Álvaro. At the foot of these trees grow the most sacred plants, meaning the mushrooms we are now going to seek out.'

That evening, at the end of a long walk, they find themselves in the deepest part of the wood. Birds flit like spangled lights among the topmost branches and others sing from within their hidden nests. The smell of rotting leaves mingles with the scent of invisible flowers.

'Here they are, here they are, come here my loves, come to me my little sons,' and Leonora falls to her knees at the foot of a tree. 'These are the right ones. Try this,' and she holds out a mushroom to him.

'You're crazy.'

'Don't call me that word! I know what I am doing, take one and watch,' with which she starts slowly masticating.

'It might be poisonous.'

'Of course it isn't, I know what I'm about. Put it in your mouth, it's the food of the gods. In any case, you're a doctor so you can save the gods.'

It goes through Álvaro like a purgative. Leonora laughs and places her shawl on the ground wrapped up to form a pillow, and invites him

to lie beneath the spread branches of the tree.

'We are going to sleep here.'

'No, let's go down to the village: this is too dangerous. You could be making an attempt on your life without so much as knowing it.'

'The only danger, Álvaro, is not doing what one wishes. Lie down, the earth is really soft here.'

Stretched out beside her, his emotions heightened by the effort, exhausted, and suffering vertigo after the long walk, the crickets and the frogs conspire to have him shut his eyes.

'There would be nothing unpleasant about dying like this. If I die now then I accept it utterly.'

When he opens his eyes again, he sees that Leonora's are also wide open and that she is crying. How long has he slept? In the profoundly dark night the stars are still shining. He wants to ask her why she is crying, but no sound comes from his mouth. He sees her black hair on the ground, her fine profile and the tears running down her cheeks, and for the first time he has the feeling that up until now his whole life has been meaningless. There can be no doubt about it, he has more than met his match in this woman. When will he be able to express his feelings like she can? Never. When had he ever met a woman more delicate and more mistress of herself at one and the same time? Her instincts, that to start with infuriated him impossibly, now open up parts of him he never thought he possessed. Finally, after who knows how long, the dawn succeeds in restoring his sense of movement and he embraces her. He feels more tenderly towards her than ever: 'Leonora, my child, Leonora.' She hides her head against his neck, and he plucks bits out of her hair, smoothes down her skirt and leads her to the hotel. 'Come with me and let's go and have a bath.'

The morning cheese buns offered them by a man with white hair taste of heaven in all its glory, and the water in the stream looks like liquid diamonds. Having seen her once before, the locals recognise Leonora at once: 'Ah the little foreigner, little German, little Italian, little *gringa,* little French one!' It is true that she belongs to every one of these lands.

At midday, with the sun shining directly overhead in the midst of the skies, Álvaro places his hand on his forehead like a visor and asks her:

'Why don't we just stay and live here forever?'

'No,' replies Leonora in a tone of authority. 'Now it is time for us to leave.'

'Who did you come here with the last time? Everyone seems to recognise you.'

'I came with my husband.'

'Let's go,' and he takes her by the arm and falls silent.

53. DÍAZ ORDAZ, CHIN, CHIN, CHIN

GABRIEL AND PABLO CHOOSE DEGREE courses in Medicine, a clear reflection of and resemblance to their mother, the alchemist who deals in the mysteries of life and death. Gaby soon abandons Medicine, tempted first by Anthropology, then by English Literature, and finally going for Comparative Literature and Philosophy.

'I want to write, Ma, because writing is an escape from everyday life.'

'So is painting. To Leonardo da Vinci, painting was dumb poetry and poetry was blind painting.'

'One always writes for someone else, doesn't one, Ma? Who do you paint for?'

'For my father. I never believed his death could cause me pain, and it's taken me until today to realise that I've started every picture with him in mind. But you know I paint for you and Pablo too, as well as Kati and Chiki, and for Remedios. Most of all I painted for Edward, and I miss him more than anyone else.'

'Invent him for yourself, like you invent your whole world.'

'I think it's much more likely that this world invented me.'

Gaby gets up at any early hour of the dawning morning, whenever a poem comes to mind. Chiki wakes up when he sees light emerging from his son's bedroom.

'Tomorrow you won't be awake for any of your university courses.'

'Poetry is a tyrant and if you don't write when the moment is right, it all evaporates.'

'Now go back to sleep.'

'I don't want to.'

At university, youth and rebellion weave themselves together; the students have no blueprints for the future, because they have no idea of what it will be. The country denies them this. What most exasperates them are their rulers, who attempt to tell them the way Mexico should be and how they should behave themselves. 'I'll dress however I want to.' 'I don't want to take a degree in that, I want to change to Philosophy.' 'I'm not going to get married, or have any children.' 'I am in favour of free abortion on demand.' 'The President of the Republic is a son of a bitch.' Nowadays, women are more daring. When a young man takes their fancy, they say so. It happens to Gaby, and he is left speechless by the familiarity of the redhead who makes a pass at him.

The 'trots', 'mamelukes', 'anarchists' and 'CP-ers' all attack one another. Roberto Escudero proposes that the President comes to meet

the crowds massing in the main square, the Zócalo. He proposes that members of the National Assembly disclose their income; that they enter into dialogue with the people on the necessary measures to be taken; that transparency is introduced into public finances and, above all, in elections, so that every child is provided with a school place and all university graduates have access to a job. The student leader who attracts the most followers is Luis Tomás Cervantes Cabeza de Vaca. Strong and thoughtful and kind-natured, he wants the country to belong to the young, not to the politicians. 'We are all one, and everything belongs to everyone'; 'The oppressors are in the government'; 'The truth belongs to us'; 'Mexico, freedom'; 'Yes to books, no to bayonets!'; 'The real agitators are ignorance, hunger and poverty'; 'We don't want the Olympics, we demand the Revolution'; 'Zócalo, Zócalo, Zócalo'.

'I don't ask for a gun, I want a word,' says José Revueltas, brandishing his pen. 'This is my gun.'

Students follow him across the area of flat ground in front of the Registry. José — who they call Pepe — jokes and recommends they read Rilke, César Vallejo, Baudelaire. He returns to his sources in Dostoyevsky and Thomas Mann. 'Do you have enough cash for books, mate? If not, you can use mine.' He looks like a Greek philosopher followed by his retinue. The police are always looking for him, and he lives from one day to the next, sleeping wherever he fetches up. It could be stretched out on the floor of the offices of the Society of Writers at Filomeno Mata Street, number 8. The lecture theatre called 'Justo Sierra' is renamed 'Che Guevara'. When it is occupied by students, they sleep on the stage and in the aisles, then cover the walls with paintings of Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa. They dress and wash in the theatre toilets. When they leave their toothpaste and brush in the sink, nobody steals them.

Helicopters circle over the city centre.

Hijacking a bus is the perfect form of student activism. The driver is afraid, pleading, on the verge of tears, with them not to do anything to him, trying to locate the ringleader: there's always some guy, the strongest one among them, the rebel boss.

'Please don't do anything to the vehicle, it's not mine, but if you break anything at all, the boss will make me pay for it, and you tell me, what have I got to pay him with? How will I manage to do that?'

Some of them say to leave him in peace, that he's just a poor sod, whereas others urge them on. Just like in a stadium when the Pumas are playing.

'Come on! Don't be a wimp, we're not going to do anything to you, just take us straight to the Zócalo — right now!'

Three blocks later a police patrol intercepts them and the activists

whistle and stamp their feet on the floor.

'Drive right at them!' orders their leader.

They drag the driver from his seat and accelerate at the patrol.

In the streets of the city centre, traders are afraid of the university students. If two young people pause in front of a shop window, the store owner threatens them: 'Get a move on, get going now you pieces of shit!' Others just pull the metal shutters down over their shop fronts. Carrying a student card can prove dangerous.

'We're going to end up having to swallow them up,' Cabeza de Vaca tells his gang of supporters in the Chapingo National School of Agriculture.

Nobody now attends church on Sundays, and nobody bothers to ask Gaby or Pablo whether they are Jews or Catholics any more. Just the opposite: the younger generation loathe religion. The most radical students are in the School of Political Science, and it is the future sociologists and political scientists who are behind the occupation of the Pedregal de Santo Domingo, the patch of stony lava taken over by poor people. Rather than forcing them out, the students from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México help them to build homes there. Real life is unfolding in the Polytechnic and the University City. 'UNAM, the free territory of America,' a youth proclaims at the top of his voice.

Pablo brings friends home where, seated around the kitchen table, they plan to abolish the official political party, that of the Institutionalised Revolution; to depose all corrupt judges; and to go out and puncture tyres and take part in marches and sit-down protests. 'I really despise all the men in our government,' declares Martín Dozal. He seems an intelligent man to Gaby, as he talks about machismo in the Mexican home, and relates how the person he most admires is his mother, a seamstress. Pablo takes the mickey out of the formality of the speeches from the Mexican Revolution that keep getting repeated, Dozal explains how he entered the School of Sociology because he thought it the most radical university department, but that from then on he had experienced little but an enormous disappointment. Even the crowd in Anthropology were a load of wet fish. Little Mexican princesses are chauffeured to the School of Education by their family drivers and deny even a glimpse of a smile to their fellow students.

Gaby stays in contact with Renato Leduc. He comes round to dinner, and Gaby complains to him about the university bureaucracy; the secretaries that lose track of academic records; the endless long waits in front of one information desk after another: 'You are missing a copy of your secondary school graduation certificate'; 'The date of birth you gave us is not the same as the one we have here.' Renato

replies by telling him that there is no worse form of bureaucracy than matrimony, for it's the one that kills love. Also that young people's surrender to the cause of social justice is the worst of inventions, for everyone anyway eventually integrates into the system as they grow old. When he's in his company Gaby laughs a lot, for Renato is the best-informed man in Mexico, he spices bad news with his sense of humour and Gaby roars with laughter when Renato vows that Leonora is a marvellous friend, and a Churchill in skirts as a wife.

'Well I at any rate intend to get married,' Pablo announces.

Leonora furiously protests: 'Getting married is like getting involved with the police even when the police aren't getting involved with you.'

'Ma, we're not going to be with you for the rest of our lives.'

Newsreaders repeat the jargon of 'pinkos', '*provocateurs*', 'infiltrators', 'subversives', 'Communists', 'de-stabilising elements', and 'marxists' on a daily basis, and Leonora's indignation mounts.

Edward James turns up at the door with two boa constrictors and asks Pablo: 'Can you get me some rats to feed them with?'

'The ones we have in our labs are for scientific experiments.'

With great difficulty, Pablo secretes two fat rats for him. He brings them to Edward at the Hotel Francis: he puts them in his bath tub, where he keeps his boas. Two days later, James goes into his bathroom and the rats have eaten up the boas.

Pablo only finishes his medical practicals late at night, returning home at one or two in the morning. Some nights he forgets his keys and Chiki gets up to let him in. After making him coffee, they take George out for a walk, he's the collie dog Pablo adores. While George sniffs around the walls and the kerbs, Pablo confides his worries to his father. All at once, Chiki looks at his watch: 'Already four in the morning? I can't believe it — how fast time passes! We'd better get back as your mother is bound to be worried.'

Each time there's a ring at the door, Leonora explodes. Gaby and Pablo have a mimeographer: they print flyers inveighing against the government and the armed forces. They announce the next march or demonstration. When they are not busy printing, they go out to take up collections with tin cans emblazoned with the initials CNH, for the *Comisión Nacional de Huelgas* — the National Council for Strikes. Motorists often verbally abuse them: 'Why aren't you in school?', 'You should go and get yourselves a job, you lazy gits!' The young people are motivated by rage: it's high time their voices are heard. Adults have nothing at all to offer them.

Pablo gets up onto a soap box, taking the word onto the streets, speaking on the corner of Sonora market. Gaby distributes propaganda flyers on buses and at the factory gates, and improvises short popular

comic plays. The Olympic Games are headline news in both print and broadcast media, and the student movement is damaging the image the Mexican government wants to give the world. It is high time to put a stop to the saboteurs. Pablo rebels. 'Why won't the President show his face on the balcony of the National Palace?' Meanwhile, Gaby makes fun of the authorities in his impromptu street theatre.

All along the Avenida Álvaro Obregón, trucks of soldiers in blue uniforms and helmets resembling chamber pots trundle up and down. Gaby and Pablo join the medical brigades and Pablo has attended to numerous wounded students. They live amidst real and imaginary terrors, since the army is ever more visible and tales of kidnappings are running through the Faculty of Medicine.

Chiki and Leonora feel as if they are back in the war years. All that's missing are the bombers flying over the capital city. Gaby and Pablo are always rushing to answer the doorbell, and to let in Javier, Mateo, Tita, Naha, Carlos, Raul or Elisa, each looking over their shoulders in case they are being followed. 'I've come for the flyers.' 'They've taken Edgardo Bermúdez from the Poly.' 'They are pursuing all the university lecturers.' Leonora's heart is in her mouth each time her sons leave the house. 'They tortured Luis Tomás Cervantes Cabeza de Vaca, who was at Chapingo, and almost killed him in the process.' Anguish reddens Chiki's eyes even more than before.

In the classrooms and corridors of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, they lay out mattresses and sleeping bags. 'Our house is now under surveillance. My parents are furious with me.' The government regards UNAM as a hotbed of agitation. Why does the rector, Barros Sierra, allow them to stay overnight in the classrooms? 'They aren't students, they're just parasites, illiterates and total cynics.' Gaby and Pablo cross the road whenever they see a policeman. Gaby has grown his hair long. Wherever he goes, he takes a little puppy in his jacket pocket with him. Whenever he opens the front door, this seduces one visitor after another. With his right hand he takes out the little puppy to get some air and the response is always the same: 'Oh, how adorable! Just look at him, he fits into the palm of your hand!' from yet another enamoured adolescent.

The two brothers march and demonstrate with their Faculties, and Gaby follows up with his *happenings* and his circus turns. 'Leonora, I saw your boys on the demonstration.' 'Leonora, I bumped into Pablo in front of the Registry.' 'Take good care of him, it seems to me as if he is really involved in the movement and Diaz Ordaz is raging against all those who are against the Olympic Games.' The brothers leave the house with their knapsacks on their backs and Leonora never knows when they will be back.

'I'm so scared that something will happen to them.'

Chiki remains silent. The soldiers are capable of who-knows-what. The flyers represent them as orang-utang.

All along the Paseo de la Reforma blue trucks called 'julias' are stationed at intervals.

'That's what they take you to jail in,' Pablo informs everyone.

Army lorries crammed with soldiers pass by three times a day.

'We are afraid that even more serious things will happen, there are vigils every evening in many parts of the city,' Inés Amor confides to her friends over afternoon tea.

On 18th September, the army violates the autonomous territory of the University City, detaining the academic and administrative staff and students alike. The violence with which the University City is invaded terrifies Leonora and Chiki. 'They threw all the books on the floor, then trampled and even urinated on them.'

'Time to take to the hills,' Sócrates Campos Lemus orders. 'And time for me to get hold of some machine guns.'

Lorenzo Rios Ojeda, a student at the Polytechnic's Faculty of Biology, is murdered by a policeman while he is painting graffiti on a street wall in the Lindavista district. He had told his parents he would be home late that evening, since he was going out to paint the words 'Únete pueblo!' — 'People unite!' — along the fences. Pablo used to know him, as they had sometimes attended lectures together. When he told him of his intention to specialise in pathology, Lencho replied: 'And I in biology.'

'Ma, we're not big activists, but we can't stand by as if we were indifferent. That at least is what you have taught us, and so it was proved by our time on the kibbutz.'

Leonora is comforted by the fact that some of her friends stand up for the students, and go along to the patch of wasteland near the Registry on Sundays to read poems and play music. Gabriel Zaid reads aloud from his latest book, *Seguimiento*, and lovers sit listening on the grass.

'It looks as if they lifted Pino, Salvador Martínez della Rocca, and seized a whole load of people from the Poly, giving them a really rough time.'

Times are changing. In Berkeley, Joan Baez sings her song to Sacco and Vanzetti and holds blossoming chrysanthemums in her hands. *Peace and love.* No-one is going to go to war again. Gaby's long hair provokes a passing cyclist to call out 'Hippy!' and an old man allows the words 'Bloody queer, bloody fag!' to escape from between his false teeth.

When he leaves the UNAM campus, Gaby goes straight on to deliver classes at the José María Espinosa hall in the Institute of Philosophy:

‘I am going to pull the rug from underneath you,’ he challenges his students. ‘For the next class you need to read *A Doll’s House*.’

Among the students, Rosa Nissan is scandalised by Henrik Ibsen. Accustomed to obeying, Gabriel Weisz’s class shakes them to the core. It has the same effect on Miriam, Esther, Guita and Sara, who announces that she has decided to leave her husband because Professor Weisz has shown her that she is really nothing more than an object.

‘Change your lives, read Virginia Woolf’s book, *A Room of One’s Own*. What, don’t you know how to work?’ he enquires with irony.

‘It’s just that bringing up kids takes time,’ Esther protests.

‘You don’t have to only think about your children. You should have your own room, your own body and your own money.’

Leonora educated her sons within a feminist tradition; her influence is so strong that Gaby starts teaching sexual politics and gender studies from the standpoint of anthropological and magical rituals.

Every class is a source of provocation. Newly wed female students discuss what’s happening over dinner with their husbands, who exclaim: ‘Who on earth put such ideas into your head? Where on earth did this little maestro of yours come from?’

Finally, Gabriel is expelled, for spreading the ideas he’d derived from his mother.

Leonora scarcely sees her lover Álvaro any more. She is irritated by his indifference to the events around them.

‘Why aren’t you afraid?’

‘Don’t worry about it, nothing much is going to happen. The government will win and that’s all there is to it.’

On the night of 2nd October, a young man arrives wide-eyed and out of breath at their door.

‘Where are Gaby and Pablo?’ he manages to gasp out to Leonora.

‘At the meeting in Tlatelolco Square, in the Cuauhtémoc district.’

‘The army has been slaughtering people there. Soldiers are everywhere and arresting anyone they see with long hair.’

Leonora’s hands fly to her head and Chiki holds her tight.

‘May I stay here until they get back?’

‘Yes. Would you like a cup of tea?’ asks Leonora, cigarette in hand.

‘I’d prefer a joint.’

‘There isn’t any,’ Chiki interrupts.

‘Please may I ring home?’

‘Of course you may. But if there’s a ring on the door, you have to run and hide in the darkroom at the end of the corridor.’

‘How did you escape?’

‘Everything was going well until a helicopter flew over the square. It fired two green flares, let loose a hail of bullets, and I ran, heading straight up the avenue. I could hear the tramping of army boots. The soldiers were shouting: “We’ll show you, sons of bitches!” Then the tanks rolled in, as if they meant to turn the place into a battlefield.’

Gaby and Pablo finally arrived back at two in the morning, carrying only the clothes they stood up in.

‘How great to see you here, Leonardo!’ and they embrace their friend hiding there. ‘The government turned the tanks on us and began firing. We ran up to the top floor of the Nuevo León building and a girl let us hide in the maid’s room. She herself came back to let us out at midnight. They took away thousands of our friends. I’m going to ring Leduc: he knows everyone and is the one person who can help us now,’ says Gaby.

‘An old woman who must have been at least forty,’ recounts Pablo, ‘went directly up to a tank and said to the soldier: “You should be ashamed of yourself to be out here, killing young people your own age,” and the guy was so astonished he let her go.’

‘Come over to the table and have some tea,’ interrupts Leonora. ‘No, Ma, we have something more urgent to do first.’ Gaby is looking at Pablo.

‘What are you going to do?’ asks Chiki.

‘We are going to get rid of the cyclostyling machine.’

They dig a hole in the patio, heave the machine into it, and cover it over with earth.

‘They are capable of doing anything, Ma. One day, some future occupant of the house will excavate this weird archaeological artefact.’

The Weisz family spend one of the worst nights in their lives. Next day, the newspapers proclaim that the government have won the war on the guerrillas, Communists and trouble-makers.

‘Please don’t go out on to the street,’ Leonora beseeches her sons.

Five days after the massacre, on 7th October, the writer Elena Garro denounces any writers, painters and film directors who attended the mass meetings in the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters. According to her, the young people were egged on by Luis Villoro, José Luis Cuevas, Leopoldo Zea, Rosario Castellanos, Eduardo Lizalde, Carlos Monsiváis, Victor Flores Olea, José Revueltas, Leonora Carrington and even Octavio Paz, Mexico’s ambassador to India and Garro’s former husband. An anonymous phone call to Leonora terrifies her: ‘We’ve got them under surveil-lance.’ Then the telephone rings again.

‘Take great care of your sons, Leonora,’ Renato tells her.

On 12th October *Siempre!* magazine publishes an article by José

Alvarado, in which he writes: ‘There was beauty and light in the souls of the dead youths. They wanted to make Mexico an abode of justice and truth with bread, liberty and literacy for the oppressed and forgotten. We want a land free of poverty and corruption. And now these youths have been cut down in the prime of their lives. One day there will be a votive lamp lit to them all.’

This news takes Leonora back to her flight from France in 1940. Other parents are out searching for their children. Manuela Garín and Rogelio Álvarez publish a notice in *El Día* asking the whereabouts of their disappeared son, Raúl. ‘They are holding them all in solitary confinement, in military camp Number One.’ ‘They have tortured them.’ ‘The army won’t let anyone else inside.’ ‘They stripped them naked in Tlatelolco and kept them that way in the pelting rain.’ ‘They treated them as if they were murderers.’ ‘By some miracle, Heberto Castillo escaped among the rocks in the Pedregal.’ The word ‘prison’ is on everyone’s lips. It is no longer the Germans invading France who threaten Leonora. This time the Mexicans are persecuting her, coming to murder her children.

‘Chiki, we have to get out of here as soon as possible.’

‘You know full well I don’t have a passport.’

54. BETWEEN MEXICO AND NEW YORK

AT THE END OF 1968, Leonora and her two sons fly out to New Orleans to stay with Larry Bornstein. A few weeks later, Chiki sends a letter to say that it is safe for them to return to Mexico, that the danger is now past, and that UNAM has returned to normality.

They find the University City empty. Their return to the Faculty feels like yet another defeat. Their comrades are devastated, their leaders in jail, and family members form a queue outside the doors of the former Palace of Lecumberri, now converted into a dark prison. Leonora jumps each time the phone rings, and she is unable to focus on her painting. Inés Amor is putting pressure on her, as she needs more paintings for Leonora's first solo exhibition, due to open in the Gallery of Mexican Art in 1969.

'How are you going to support your sons? Pour yourself out into your art.'

'When I was painting a cannibal with forks for hands and feet, against a red background, I had in mind the President of the Republic.'

'I shall ensure that it gets included in the exhibition.'

'I'm afraid.'

Leonora has grown so thin that you can count her ribs. Her shoulder blades seem to be trying to protrude through her blouse, and her cheekbones are pushing through the skin of her face.

'Eat, Leonora, eat, you're living on cigarette smoke and cups of tea,' Chiki protests in despair. Then — 'Gaby, get your hair cut!' he orders.

More because of the anguish in his father's voice than through conviction, Gaby returns home with a military-style crew cut that makes his penetrating eyes stand out all the more.

Pablo obtains a place at New York University to read Pathology.

'My specialism is the study of suffering: I am certain that it is not only the body which requires medical care,' Pablo, who has also become a Jungian, insists.

'Chiki, I can't live without my sons. I am going to follow them.'

Chiki visits Kati several times a week.

'Don't worry about it. It's just the way Leonora is, she'll be home soon.'

Leonora bids Álvaro farewell.

'What should I do with the picture you painted for me, Leonora?'

'Burn it.'

'And if you're not going to go on coming to the flat, what do I do with your easel and your canvases?'

‘We can come and collect them on Thursday, if you like,’ says Leonora, relenting a little.

Álvaro attempts to calm her down. ‘Nothing is going to happen to your sons. What’s going on here is not the same as the European war you had to live through.’

‘On the contrary, it *is* a war. Plenty of people have died and I’m leaving.’

She finds a flat in New York overlooking Gramercy Park, a square walled garden accessible only to key-holders. She chooses it for its location, very close to the Kristine Mann bookshop that belongs to the C. G. Jung Center. On its shelves, besides the complete works of Carl Jung, can be found a phenomenal collection of psychology texts and esoterica. Leonora goes there on a near-daily basis. She also takes on a hound called Baskerville, inherited from the flat’s former tenants. The apartment is buried in a dark basement. Within a week the bookshop owner, impressed by her curiosity, offers her an armchair at the back of the shop so she can continue reading right there, in comfort.

‘I can see that the desire to learn is a feature of your personality. I too am passionate about Jung’s works.’

‘I certainly find him more interesting than Freud,’ replies Leonora.

‘Do you analyse your dreams?’

‘Yes, I try to keep note of them, but I have never painted a dream. Everything in my pictures is taken from reality.’

‘So you are an artist?’

With her mackintosh still flowing behind her as it did years before when she arrived from Portugal, Leonora tirelessly paces the streets. She is worried about her lack of funds. If the Brewster Gallery does not sell her paintings, she shall not be able to cover the rent. Her sons both hold scholarships and Chiki lives on what he can earn.

The distance between the two of them is now a gulf.

Leonora walks without registering the distance she covers. Walking is her salvation. Watching the asphalt disappear beneath her feet is like watching water flow by. ‘I am a pirate and I am all-powerful! As long as I can put one foot in front of the other, nothing bad is going to happen to me.’ What a spring she has in her stride! What good legs she has!

‘Did you come on foot?’ her friend Natalia Zaharías asks. ‘Do you realise the number of the blocks you walked to get here?’

Leonora smiles: ‘I could walk plenty more if need be.’

She crosses paths, with plenty of others also keeping up the pace. What waves of empathy there are between them!

Her hopes are placed in the Surrealist exhibition in New York’s Byron Gallery. Working deep down in the dark basement depresses her. Her study in Mexico, however small it may be, at least catches the

sun.

She is questioned regarding the magical powers of the Surrealist Movement, and she answers that she now finds an artist's duty is to be aware of what they are doing, even if that means putting trousers on a Venus or on her twin sister, the Gorgon.

Maurie dies in 1970. 'Now I am really an orphan: I have no father, no mother, and no nanny.' The powdered features of her mother — *too much rouge, Mama, too much rouge* — accompany her night and day. 'Nobody else could love me as much as she did. Her devotion and loyalty were absolute. If there were ever someone constantly at my side, it was my mother.' She is assailed by remorse. 'Why didn't I see more of her when I could? Why wasn't I there with her in the hour of her death? She died all alone.' After Hazelwood, with its empty and desolate gardens, Leonora travels on to Ireland, to the Isle of Man, and to Scotland. She visits the standing stones of Stenness in the Orkney Islands and drinks glasses of Scotch to her mother's health. A Tibetan lama, seeing her unhappiness, consoles her saying: 'Life is a river that flows, it is useless to cling to things, each thing has to flow with the current. It serves no purpose at all to become attached either to people or to possessions.'

'What should I do?'

'Go deeper inside yourself, be sure to meditate from the moment you rise from your bed every morning. Repeat the mantra *Nam myoho renge kyo*, and it will calm you. Do not think about anything. You may even achieve the dream that you have never dared to dream.'

Leonora tries to follow his counsel: she is assailed by the voices of Gaby and Pablo, and by a ceaseless anxiety. Her sons now have a life of their own, and yet it is impossible for her to let them go. Seeing and hearing them are at least as important to her as eating.

Along with Maurie's death, Leonora is haunted by loneliness and the passage of time. She returns to see the Tibetan lama and, as they walk along together, he tells her how once upon a time there was a little bird, lying on its back with its claws in the air, and another bird asked him what he was doing. The first bird replied: 'I am holding up the skies with my claws, and if I move they are bound to fall down.' At that instant a leaf floated down from the tree and the frightened bird flew off … and the sky did not fall down.'

'Are you trying to tell me that I should leave off holding up the world?'

'Yes. Your sons can now fly unaided. You need to embark on a new flight with new wings.'

The Dalai Lama travels on to Canada, and Leonora follows in his wake. Buddhism frees her from a sense of anguish. The guru's words cause her to feel reborn:

‘Go and seek tranquillity. Thus shall you achieve Nirvana. You possess an intuitive wisdom.’

Greatly comforted, Leonora prepares an exhibition for the Iolas Gallery and the *Centro de Relaciones Interamericanas* in New York. She is also invited to exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in Austin, Texas. She publishes *The Stone Door*, written many years ago when Chiki caused her to fall in love with him by telling her all about his childhood. Back then, Pablo, Chiki, Gaby, Kati, José, Remedios and Edward James were her world. Their love life became difficult and Renato was right when he said: ‘Marriage is the bureaucracy of love’, but she hadn’t known how to unloose herself in time. What she did know was how to differentiate love from desire, and had no reason to complain regarding the latter: she had aroused many strong passions and responded to almost all of them, because she understood that a desire left unquenched burns on your body, and an incinerated life is no life at all.

When she’s not painting or exhibiting, she returns to the Kristine Mann bookshop, and the owner receives her with an open and happy smile. Surrounded by antique books and treatises on alchemy, he resembles a magus, and when he tells her he has the blueprint of the alchemical rose, Leonora replies that to her the only alchemical rose is a cabbage.

‘A cabbage?’ asks the bookseller in surprise.

‘Of course. The cabbage cries when it is wrenched from the earth, and cries all over again when it is plunged into boiling water, just as trout also do. Have you seen how they are thrown in alive and double up in a final effort to catch their breath?’

‘If you have such a heightened degree of sensitivity, you’ll know how to take care of this book,’ and the bookshop owner presents her with a copy of Roger Bacon’s *The Mirror of Alchemy*. ‘This is the French edition, published in Lyons in 1553.’

Leonora cannot contain her emotion: ‘Don’t worry, I learnt French as a child, and went on to cultivate vineyards in France.’

Painting a cabbage is akin to painting the alchemical blue rose, or the blue poison that comes from the peyote plant. She erects her easel right by the window, and begins slowly to trace its outline, as if savouring every moment. Drawing such a thing in New York is a challenge. Writing and painting are similar, in that both arts — with music as a third art form — require an external reception. Who will be open to receive this work here in New York? At once, Leonora thinks of the sympathetic expression on the face of the bookseller, and that afternoon, together with Baskerville, she goes on foot to the bookshop. The books warm the walls, the atmosphere is loving, and Leonora takes off her coat.

‘How is the painting going?’ he asks her.

Leonora suspects that at best he simply won’t understand her work, for we are all different, we each perceive things differently, and explaining things makes little sense, for he is bound to only understand things in his own way. And who is he? She realises she doesn’t even know his name. Abruptly, she asks him what it is. It turns out that he is Swiss — German, just like Carl G. Jung; that he comes from Basel; and that his name is Carl Hoffmann.

‘On one occasion a dog barked at a mask I’d made, and to me that was the most honest comment ever made on any piece of my work,’ Leonora tells him, which makes him laugh.

He invites her to dinner and she accepts. The restaurant has something of the atmosphere of a sanctuary and a hearth — just like the bookshop — and after a glass of red wine Leonora starts discussing her views on feminism.

‘I don’t know of any religion which does not proclaim that women are mentally feeble, unclean, or inferior to the male of the species.’

‘Yet the whole of culture gravitates around women, and they are called the cream of our species. What then happens is that Homo Sapiens is less wise than he thinks.’

‘You’re right. We possess the very mysteries of life.’

‘Tomorrow I’ll show you the books I have by Germaine Greer, Betty Friedan, Sandra Gilbert … I am certain you already know those by Mary Wollstonecraft.’

Leonora returns to Mexico. ‘All this time I was trying to distance myself from here. I never could, some spell holds me trapped in Mexico like a fly caught in honey.’

A feminist video artist called Lucero González requests a poster design from her. It is intended to read: ‘Women Con-science’. Leonora paints an Eve giving back the apple and so recovering her right to rule. Her reflections captivate Lucero, who listens to her avidly, sitting at the kitchen table in her home. According to the artist, the Bible contains more omissions than truths, and depends heavily on the interpretations of those who wrote it down. How had God become so popular when he is a furious old man who castigates and destroys? How can people worship someone who sends only plagues and annihilation? Why does Eve get blamed for every catastrophe? Who gave life to human beings made in the image of angels? Eve or Lilith? The Big Bang or the Golem? The serpent god Quetzalcoatl?

Lucero González listens to her without batting an eyelid, and Leonora goes on:

‘If all the women across the globe decided to take control of their fertility, reject war, not to mention racial and sexual discrimination, the world would be a different place.’

Once back in Mexico, the artist becomes as essential an attraction as the pyramids at Teotihuacan or Chapultepec castle. She receives them all — the fan, the gallerist and the art critic — and smiles courteously, in spite of her longing for them all to leave.

Collectors arrive from the United States and Europe, and journalists chase interviews.

What a bloody nuisance! Leonora grows impatient with the number of times there's a knock at her door.

She protects her private life. As the homage paid to her increases, it becomes more of a burden, since it is impossible to be allowed to keep smoking on a rostrum in front of everyone. 'Sheer agony!' she repeats to herself. 'If only the goddess Diana would descend and transform me into a salt codfish!'

Leonora recites aloud:

'The codfish lays ten thousand eggs,
The little hen lays but one.
The codfish never cackles
To tell you what she's done.
And so we scorn the codfish,
While the humble hen we prize,
Which only goes to show you,
Friends: it pays to advertise.'

Although Leonora has never sought it out, she is now being pursued by publicity.

The Mexico City university, UNAM, pays her homage in the Aula Magna of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, filled to overflowing. Crowds of young people cram the corridors, dressed in denim jeans and carrying rucksacks on their backs. They talk loudly and scratch their ribs. Some also smoke. Others play chess, regardless of the surrounding racket. The walls are so thickly covered there's no room for even one more poster.

'Looking for a student to flat-share, only five minutes from the UNAM'; 'The Karl Marx Society holds debates every Wednesday'; 'Learn German with a native speaker'; 'Tai Chi every afternoon in the UNAM annex'; 'Under pressure to complete your thesis? We can help you.' A skinny young man in traditional woven leather sandals collects signatures for a petition demanding that the canteen lower its food prices. All at once, Leonora finds herself surrounded by young people, barely one third her age, who treat her as if they have known her all their lives. A young woman with unkempt hair, dressed in a blue jumper and torn trousers, approaches her with a copy of *The House of Fear*, and hands the book to her.

'Señora Carrington, could you please dedicate this copy of your book to me? I am one of your greatest admirers,' and she holds out a

pen.

'What is your name?'

'My father called me Leonora after you.'

The Englishwoman's eyes light up as she writes: 'From Leonora to Leonora, with affection.'

The girl bids her farewell, and a number of journalists approach the podium. Leonora thinks she recognises one in the front line, a diminutive woman busily writing in a red notebook with the concentration of a Buddha. Suddenly she looks up and asks Leonora point blank: 'Did you enjoy your First Communion?'

Leonora smiles at her and everyone else laughs.

'Yes, because afterwards my mother took me to the zoo. I took my First Communion in a small mining village where men would work hard in the dark in order for others to live in the light.'

'And a hyena taught you to speak French?'

'Indeed. She read me a chapter from Balzac's *Eugénie Grandet* and I promised to return for more the following week.'

The reporter keeps on writing while the others make use of the opportunity and hustle for autographs. Mention is made of Max Ernst and a tall woman, swathed in necklaces, with heels as high as stilts, giving her first lecture on the world of dreams.

Between 1973 and 1975, Leonora paints *A Warning to Mother, The Powers of Madame Phoenicia* and *Grandmother Moorhead's Aromatic Kitchen*. In this last painting she creates a kitchen in Puebla, with its Talavera mosaics, its pots and jars of fired earth hanging on the walls. The cooks hold fans in their hands to blow the hot coals of the stove; they resemble paper kites and the little handmills whirl like tin humming tops. Leonora sets five Mexican women to grind corn, chop vegetables, taste and flavour the soup, and lightly roast chillies on a giant metal rack where a cabbage, a red pepper, cloves of garlic and, of course, numerous ears of corn on the cob await. A huge white goose with the air of a Celtic god is joining the ritual.

'I am paying tribute to Mary Monica Moorhead. The pestles and mortars, the flat metal trays for cooking the tortillas, have all been an integral part of my life now for many years. I know how to make a good guacamole, my sauces and especially my chocolate *mole* for chicken are delicious and my rice never sticks. It would give me great pleasure to eat the Archbishop of Canterbury in a *mole* made with green chile.'

When reference is made to her beauty, Leonora grows irritated: 'Thank you. The one good thing about old age is that it makes one less sensitive to other people's personalities.'

In *Self-Portrait*, Leonora paints herself as a scarecrow, her face covered by a white sheet and a straw hat, intended to scare off the

birds. From the barren earth, a crow looks on and waits for her to fall. ‘There is nothing human about me any more,’ she alleges, and when asked why, she replies firmly: ‘Old people like us are not considered as human beings. On the contrary, we’re seen as a bag of rancid, decomposing meat, or a sack of bones that gets dumped in an old people’s home as soon as it begins to look unpleasant. The only thing we are left with is fear and shame at our failing memories, as we repeat the same things to the same people and it grows harder to remember what we have to do, perhaps because our minds turn more and more inwards, looking towards death.’

She devours Lewis Carroll anew: ‘No book has made as great an impression on me as his.’

‘You and he have the same initials: LC,’ and Chiki smiles at her.

‘Yes, even though that’s not his real name. He was christened Charles Dodgson. “But I don’t want to go among mad people,” Alice remarked. “Oh, you can’t help that,” said the Cat: “we’re all mad here.”’

‘And what do you think of your ancestor, Oscar Wilde?’

‘Well, we have our self-portraits in common. He took a fair amount of time to destroy himself, and I was more practical than Dorian Gray: I already painted myself as a phantom.’

55. BASKERVILLE

THE 1985 EARTHQUAKE EXILES LEONORA once again. Right across the road from her home, the block of flats at number 193 Calle Chihuahua collapses. The flats land stacked one on top of the other, as tightly packed as a *mille-feuille* pastry. The terrified tenants depart the city altogether, as the Colonia Roma suffers as much if not more than districts in the town centre. Ambulance sirens howl all day long on the 19th September. Dust and smoke are suspended in the air, just like during the air raid on Madrid. There is no light, no water, no television or radio or telephone. Bad news gets transmitted by word of mouth, from one person to the next. 'The Hotel Regis has fallen down.' 'Nothing is left of the Chihuahua building in Tlatelolco but dust.' 'Loads of hospitals and maternity clinics have hit the ground.' 'More than ten thousand have died.'

Scarcely have communications been restored than Gaby and Pablo phone from the United States.

'CBS is saying that it's been the worst tragedy in Mexican history for five hundred years.'

Chiki races to the Calle Tabasco and to Kati's house. Nothing at all has happened to her.

'Look, Chiki, the people have organised themselves in an incredible way. It's those in government who are a complete disgrace.'

'It's only when it comes to repression that they know how to act effectively.'

'In the midst of tragedy popular organisations were forged in Spain.'

'It would be difficult to envisage Mexico lighting the flame of Socialism, still less of Anarchism. Here the Catholic Church is a repulsive institution. The ecclesiastical hierarchy has never found itself to the left of anyone or anything for as long as I can remember.'

'Anarchism is the ideology belonging to all the exploited classes and here …'

'Don't dream on, Kati. All that's left to us now is to pass on our libertarian ideals to the next generation. What more can we do?'

'I can feel my blood boil just thinking about the corruption in the powers that be.'

Chiki is deeply wounded by the sight of the city in ruins. It takes him back to the bombing of Madrid. He recalls Capa shouting in the middle of the street; Chim focusing and shooting off his camera; Gerda taking refuge behind a barricade. In no time at all, beggars have occupied the spaces among the tumbled walls of number 194 on the Calle Chihuahua, and are improvising a roof with plastic sheets and

tarpaulin. The ruins fill up with cats and dogs. The ancient Colonia Roma has seen more damaged houses than any other district in Mexico City. Leonora asks herself how people can live there amidst the dust, broken stones and bent girders. Their neighbourhood is changing and Chiki greets the new arrivals. The beggars living across the road from their house enquire: 'Would you like us to look after your car, boss?' 'Señora, may we sweep the road in front of your house?'

Each time Leonora gets on a train or a bus, she takes her unfinished dolls with her and spends the length of the journey decorating, dressing and sewing buttons on to them. Back at the hotel she continues her work, and occasionally she manages to finish one.

'Do your dolls always accompany you?' Natalia Zaharías asks her.

'Yes, to me they are like carpets and I am like the Bedouins who leave with their rugs on their backs and erect their home in the midst of the sand. I bring my dolls with me to feel at home, however far away I may be.'

She returns to the flat overlooking Gramercy Park, and the first thing she does is to go and collect Baskerville from the dog kennels. She races up along Madison Avenue, Park Avenue, Lexington Avenue and Fifth Avenue. Then she walks from Ninth Avenue to Thirtieth without feeling in the least tired. She finds nothing more stimulating than to eat up the streets until suddenly she reaches a road sign and notices she's just polished off another ten blocks.

Walking takes her back to being a mare again. Sometimes Baskerville gazes up at her with imploring eyes, his tongue hanging out like a thick red ribbon. *Come on Baskerville, don't be so lazy*. 'It's only because I'm about to drop down dead on the spot with exhaustion,' the dog replies. Leonora tells him that they're going to continue until they reach the sea, that they'll cross the bridge over the Hudson River, and that they'll salute the Statue of Liberty along the way. Sometimes, without even noticing, she revisits the streets she used to walk with Max without so much as giving him a second thought, not bothering to look out for any of the little cafés where once they met. In any case, wherever she goes, she has to leave Baskerville tied up at the entrance. If she's invited to a get-together in the evening, she always asks: 'May I bring my dog? He hates to be by himself and he smokes too many cigarettes waiting for me to call him.' Some say no, and so Leonora cuts short her visit.

She has letters to reply to and begs the Gallery to please do it for her. They see her so preoccupied that they agree. She takes part in *L'aventure surreáliste autour d'André Bréton* in Paris, and in 1986 publishes *Pigeon Vole*, short stories written in the course of the 1930s, collected into one volume for the first time. She paints *The Magdalens*

under the influence of her readings in the apocryphal gospels of Mary Magdalen. Christ arises from his tomb, and Leonora's Magdalen extends her hand to him, a stigmata on her palm. At her side, water and a giant fish symbolise Christianity.

Leonora suffers from alternating mental highs and lows, when she descends into a cave that is no longer her kitchen, but rather a black hole and a well of solitude. She repeatedly questions herself as to whether she wants to die in Mexico, and by way of consolation, imagines that death is a slow process of vaporisation, and every atom a different colour. Was it worth it to exchange the mansion at Hazelwood for a student attic in London and defy the world by going off hand in hand with Max? To bury her face in the mud of the asylum and set off for Mexico with Renato? To live exiled in a country that continues to disconcert and imprison her? She knows full well she would do it all over again, for she has taken risks ever since she was a child. Once when Winkie fell on top of her, Leonora, crushed against the floor, ordered her to get up off her: *Winkie, stand up.* 'The higher the bar, the higher we'll jump! I am a mare riding through the night. *I am a nightmare!*'

Although she did not attend the opening at the Museo Nacional de Arte, Leonora exhibits together with '*Los Surrealistas en Mexico*'. She remains in New York to launch her exhibition at the Brewster Gallery. In 1988, she publishes *The Seventh Horse* and *The House of Fear*, a further collection of short stories.

In Richmond, she rises later than usual. She accompanies her son Pablo on whatever excursion he suggests. In the afternoon, she sits down in the park to read, smoke, and think about Baskerville, now back again in the kennels. When she and Pablo go to New York, they visit the Metropolitan and the Frick museums on 70th Street, for she is passionate to hear her son's opinions, and pauses before each and every work of art, turning her head to observe his reaction, and to ask him: 'What do you think?' She neither informs or corrects, but simply listens to him.

'And now it's time for me to go and collect Baskerville, since they've told me he's on the point of a nervous breakdown.'

She returns to the Kristine Mann bookshop, and greets Carl Hoffmann once more. At the sight of her, he almost falls off his ladder propped against a bookcase. What a pleasure!

They decide to go out to eat at the same restaurant. Leonora returns to the theme of her position as a woman.

'I was born a female human animal and was told this makes me a woman. "Fall in love with a man and you'll learn what it is to be a woman." I fell in love several times without learning this lesson. "Have a baby, and you'll see." I gave birth to two babies to no better

effect. Am I the observer, or am I observed by a multitude? *Je pense, donc je suis.* Ask Descartes.'

'You shouldn't be asking who you were, but who you are right now.'

'It's like Alice's answer to the caterpillar: "I know who I *WAS* when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then."'

'Exactly …'

'Because it's true I am my thoughts, Carl, which means I could be anything: a bowl of chicken soup, a pair of scissors, a crocodile, a body or a leopard, even a mug of beer. If I am what I feel, then I am love and hatred, irritation, boredom and happiness, pride and humiliation, pain and madness.'

'Pleasure.'

'Before all else, I am my body and I yearn for an identity that demystifies me.'

Leonora has not talked so much in many years. Carl stares at her through his glasses, and considers she looks spectacular when she speaks with such passion.

'That is why I try to keep myself to the facts. I am a female of the human species who is growing old. There is nothing particularly original or edifying in my saying this. My consolation is to imagine that I am a seed which may perhaps divide and germinate into something other than what it seems to be.'

'Women like you are what restore my faith,' Carl says with a smile.

'How can you say such a thing? If you observe me attentively, you will see nothing but question marks.'

Leonora looks closely at him, face to face. Carl does not attempt to flatter her, he believes in her, and this is his way of acknowledging the privilege she is granting by talking about herself to him.

'I'm afraid of death because no-one has so far explained it to me. There are many spaces inside me, and in one of them, right beside my dreams, is my return to Earth.'

Carl walks her back to her flat overlooking Gramercy Park:

'Leonora, I have the key to this garden and we can walk there whenever you feel like it.'

56. WHAT IS DEATH LIKE?

LEONORA'S PAINTINGS ARE INCREASINGLY in demand and worth more by the day, all of which permits Leonora to acquire tastes which Chiki disapproves of.

She goes down to Richmond to visit Pablo, while Gaby attends a philosophy conference organised by the University of Virginia, and the mother and the two brothers are reunited.

'Do you remember when you took us to the cinema called *Las Américas* to see three performances of the same film?' asks Pablo, with a smile.

Her priority is her sons' well-being. Even now they are men, she always returns to a familiar theme. 'Did you eat all right today, Pablo?' 'How thin you are!' 'Cover up well against the cold, Gaby.' 'Don't skip breakfast — it's the most important meal of the day.' Pablo gets back late from his hospital shifts, and his mother waits up for him, smoking furiously.

'Ma, I am the doctor here, so please go and get some sleep. What on earth are you thinking?'

'That no-one teaches us how to die.'

Back in Mexico again, the doorbell rings impertinently:

'What a bloody nuisance! Whoever it is has absolutely no manners,' responds Leonora with irritation.

'It's a young woman who says she is a fan of yours,' announces Yolanda Gudino, the woman who takes care of her day and night.

'How dare she? Tell her to go away.'

It is impossible to complete her sentence: the girl bursts into the hall like a whirlwind, throws herself upon her, and embraces her. The more Leonora struggles, the more she smothers her.

'I am your greatest fan, I saw you at the University, I love you, I adore you, I idolise you, that means a lot, and I'll never change my mind about you!'

After nearly cracking Leonora's ribs, the girl sweeps her way in, overwhelming her. She creates air currents as she goes, accompanied by a cloud of perfume. Leonora attempts to detain her, but the young woman carries on. Yolanda observes the spectacle and the front door is still wide open.

'Please leave now, your presence is upsetting the Señora …'

It has no effect, the young woman spins round.

'The Señora does not receive visitors without prior warning, she is busy with …'

The carer is on the point of calling the police when her Señora regains enough strength to demand, in tones of high indignation:

‘How *dare* you?’

Her eyes flash with rage as she seizes, then wields, an imaginary riding crop. Authority emanates from every pore but before she can raise her arm, the girl shrieks:

‘I love you, I love you, I love you!’

‘If you love me so much, then you can respect me.’

‘That’s exactly what I am doing, Leonora.’

‘Get out of my house at once!’

‘I can’t.’

‘Yolanda, kindly show her the door.’

As Yolanda approaches, the young woman suddenly yanks down the zip of her jacket, and opens it wide:

‘I am also a mare!’ and her laughter turns to sobs.

‘This young woman is quite mad,’ Yolanda says.

Leonora lets her arm with its riding crop drop to her side, and without more ado asks her:

‘Would you like a cup of tea?’

Leonora’s carer heads to the front door to close it.

‘Come into the kitchen. What is your name?’

‘I’m called Josefina, but everyone calls me Pepita.’

Leonora observes as she drinks the tea. Her lank, unevenly cut hair hangs down to her shoulders, and her vitality shines in her complexion. Everything about her seems to be in a hurry. She has a nose ring and several more piercings in each ear lobe. When she removes her jacket, it falls to pieces, and below her ripped shirt her tummy button is revealed, decorated with two more perforations. The tattoo on her arm is a plumed serpent.

‘Whatever has happened to you?’

‘This one’s a tattoo, and the rest are piercings. Haven’t you seen them before? Now, shall I light your cigarette, Leonora?’

‘I am perfectly capable of lighting my own cigarette.’

‘What about my tea?’

Yolanda can scarcely believe her eyes.

‘What do you do with your life?’ Leonora continues.

‘The same as everyone else of my age: I study.’

‘What do you study?’

‘Arts. That’s how I’ve come to know you so well. I’ve read *The House of Fear, Memories from Below, The Seventh Seal, The Oval Lady, The Hearing Trumpet*, all of them. In addition, I have all the other books you mention. You were the reason I overdosed on Blavatsky, Ouspensky, Gurdjieff and Jung. Ernst’s painting is better than an orgasm.’

What a presumptuous young woman! Yolanda listens to her with an air of distrust, but when she makes to leave the kitchen, Leonora

gestures imperiously for her to remain.

'If she has work to do, I'll look after you. I know all about you,' says Pepita.

'Drink up your tea, I have things to do. I have to go out in a moment,' Leonora warns her severely.

'Then I'll go with you, you are my one and only commitment today.'

Pepita takes her cup of tea in her two hands and downs the contents in a gulp.

'As you wish, I've finished now.'

'Then you may leave.'

'What are you thinking of? I want to help you in whatever you do.'

'Yolanda already helps me, and my sons help me out, too.'

The girl has a ready reply to every objection. Leonora feels a childish fury rise in her throat, something she has not felt for a very long time.

'Did your parents never teach you that houses can't just be barged into like you're doing?'

'My father is dead. He was homosexual. My mother is out there somewhere, I don't know where.'

All at once, the *darketa* gets up and starts whirling around the table, dancing with such grace, and with such an open smile that Leonora can do little but let her guard down. Her raised hands fluttering above her head are two gulls, her knees and some of her thigh appear through a tear in her ripped denim jeans, and her jacket, hung on a chair back, is just as tattered, the very image of abandon.

'This is complete madness!' Leonora says, as she watches her apprehensively.

As ill luck would have it, Gaby is at the University of California, at its San Diego campus; Pablo is back in Virginia; her doctor, Zaharías, has already informed her he will be out of town for a few days; and Alan Glass, her close friend, is away in Canada. Should she call the police? Surely not. It could well be that this helplessly free spirit is a young Iphigenia.

'Now you really do need to leave, as we are going out.'

Pepita wins the battle. She accompanies the two women to the bank and, for Leonora's peace of mind, sits down without attempting to go near the cashier. Once outside on the pavement again, young people are staring at her.

'We must say goodbye now,' another command from Leonora.

'We have to go to the supermarket today,' Yolanda reminds her.

'I'll go with you in my car and we can put the shopping bags in the boot.'

‘Do you have a car?’

‘Of course I do! Where is your list?’

Two guards watch her in the supermarket as she removes her headphones from her backpack, puts them on, and starts dancing to the sound of music. Her movements attract the attention of all the other shoppers. Grasping her cigarette, Leonora leans heavily on the arm of Yolanda, who is looking on in horror at the dishevelled hurricane called Pepita while she takes over her role. Without further ado, Pepita takes charge of the trolley, joins the queue at the cash desk, and takes a sheaf of 100-*peso* notes from her backpack.

Leonora protests: ‘No, absolutely not this!’

‘That way we don’t get held up and later, when we get back to your house, you can refund me.’

When Yolanda goes out next day, she recognises Pepita’s bright green car parked on the opposite side of the road.

‘Señora, the girl who came round yesterday is outside your house again.’

‘That’s not possible!’

‘Let’s go to the cinema!’ ‘Let’s go out to the zoo!’ ‘We are going to get you up on an elephant’s back!’ ‘We have to go to La Marquesa for a motorbike ride, and picnic out in the fields!’ ‘That’s where they trained Fidel Castro’s guerrillas!’ ‘I can’t believe you haven’t been to the Brady Museum!’ ‘The most exquisite chocolate cake in Mexico can only be obtained at Dupont’s!’ ‘Every one of these places you’re going to get to know is incredible.’

Leonora defends herself: ‘I have already experienced being in a jungle of faces, and I have no desire to go back.’

The young woman takes her to discover the great crowds on the roof terraces of Tlatelolco; the human hordes in front of the Cathedral; and the cafés of the Condesa district.

‘Let’s go to the King Kong, Leonora. Give me your hand, and I’ll transmit some of my energy to you.’

Leonora slips her small hand into Pepita’s with its well-bitten fingernails.

‘You gave me a static shock!’

Leonora smiles pleasantly: ‘I still have plenty of energy in my brain lobes. Did you know that I can write with both my right and left hands? Anyway, what is the King Kong?’

‘It is a no-holds-barred night club, where you can be served by gorillas, or at least by waiters dressed up as gorillas.’

Leonora is attracted by the flurry that Pepita always provokes around her, and by what she has to teach her. ‘How come I never saw any of this before?’ Yolanda, who has accompanied them to begin with, now pleads that the washing awaits her. The artist recovers her

sense of humour.

Pepita never phones ahead to make an appointment. All she ever does is turn up and pound on the door. The moment that Yolanda opens up, she charges in like a torrent. This time she carries a bouquet of flowers in her arms.

'Don't bring me cut flowers. They are no better than corpses.'

After a few days, while Pepita drives her from one place to the next in her green car, Leonora tells her:

'With a temperament like mine, I don't always want to remember, but — I don't know why — I like to tell you things, whatever passes through my head, in fact.'

The young woman holds her breath, so the artist doesn't lose her train of memories. As she speaks, Leonora is setting things in their proper place, and the forgotten past returns in surging waves.

'My father, Carrington, prevented me from growing, and I wouldn't let him. Now that time has gone by, I no longer think he was such a serious enemy, because I was enabled to do what I did in spite of him.'

She falls silent. It's a shame not to have seen him before he died.

'My father believed that his children were members of a society whose rules must never be broken. Imperial Chemical dictated our behaviour first at home at Crookhey Hall and then at Hazelwood. He represented the success of a dynasty: first my grandfather, then my father.'

'Did you know your grandfather?'

'Yes, he was a textile engineer. He invented a fibre that made the family fortune.'

'Perhaps your grandfather is also the godfather of condoms.'

'What?'

'Yes, I carry around a dozen with me in my bag.'

'Condoms?'

'Yes, contraceptives. In order not to fall pregnant.'

'Pepita! I lived in an age when we danced Viennese waltzes with handsome officers, what do you think you are talking about? Now it's my turn to tell you something: you possess extraordinary powers but you are doing all you can to use them to destroy yourself.'

'Really?' Pepita sounds genuinely surprised.

'Why don't you live in a cabbage?'

'Why in a cabbage?'

'Because that's where infants are born, so that's where you should return.'

Pepita takes her to the University Museum 'so that you can get to know the latest contemporary art. You'll see what good vibes you get from it, woman, you need to wake up.' The artist arrives on the arm of

her young friend and descends into the luminous expanse of the museum. Leonora, who had only caught the word 'museum', anticipates visions of sixteenth-century Flemish paintings: the temptations of St. Anthony, and the gardens of delight; triptychs by Hans Memling and Roger van der Weyden, Hieronymus Van Aken or Hieronymus Bosch, only to find herself suddenly blinded by green, amber and red traffic lights flashing on and off and crisscrossing the space like flashes of lightning. The noise magnified through a massive sound system is infernal.

'What is this?'

'An installation. Do you like it?'

'It's horrible,' Leonora cringes.

In the beautifully proportioned adjacent hall, the only thing that interrupts its cavernous void is a shoebox placed on the floor at the foot of a tall white wall.

'This is another installation.'

'I don't understand. Is that rubbish really a work of art nowadays?' The artist grows indignant. 'Even Dalí's crazes and Duchamp's nudes resonate with me; this says absolutely nothing at all to me.'

'It does to me.'

'Why don't you take off, silly Pepita? I am yesterday and today, but what I am not is rubbish. What you are showing me is the work of the Earl of Shitshire and his daughter the Whole of Arse.'

'Who are they?'

'Look, just take me home,' Leonora is getting annoyed. 'I need a good cup of tea.'

'Ay, Leonora, don't punish yourself! These artists are as undesirable as the Surrealists were! They are intellectual agitators!'

'What? I've never heard anything so idiotic. There is a vast gap between intelligence and execution. These are throw-away objects.'

Despite the fact she exasperates her, the following morning Leonora recounts to Pepita how, in her dreams, Max Ernst appears, in the midst of birds extending their wings to him. He is busy painting their bellies, chests and sexual organs red. He is carving them on a surface until he turns them into bones.

'You know he was fascinated by madness.'

Pepita sees that Leonora had taken the mortal leap, and had landed unconscious right at the bottom of the well. Religion did not enslave her, nor did she submit herself to any form of ideology, any schema of abstract thought, or any artistic trend: nothing had ever prevented Leonora from living her love outside time, outside society, a love born of passion, a love like an alchemical egg, a love that could be the wind, the wind of the North they call Boreas, who owns a

dozen thoroughbred horses, the wind that could impregnate mares simply by their turning rump-first towards him.

'In St. Martin d'Ardèche, Pepita, I discovered what the concierges of Paris call a *folie a deux*. Do you know what that is?'

'Yes, I do know. I have also lived on the wild side, with my heart's blood pounding through my body, I have loved with André Breton's *amour fou*, even without André Breton.'

'Oh yes, my girl? And you discovered that emotions are worth precisely sweet nothing?'

Pepita turns white. Her hands tremble as she raises the cup of tea to her lips.

'Look, young lady, do you know how to bake bread? Do you know how to spend hours on end under the burning sun, cutting bunches of grapes? Do you know how to make your own wine? Do you know how to wash your lover's sheets and make up a bed almost in the middle of a river? Just when I was on the point of metamorphosing into the womanly support for Max's old age, preparing myself to be beside him his whole life through, a gendarme came into my kitchen and, over the cooking pot where our two loving hearts were simmering, asked for Max. Then, his rifle slung over his shoulder, he escorted him off to St. Cyprien. The war put an end to everything. In the end, my salvation has only and always been painting.'

In return, Pepita tells her that God holds her in his carelessness. Just like the Archbishop of Mexico and the President of the Republic, the Chief of Police and all prospective Members of the National Assembly.

'So who do you believe in?' asks Leonora.

'In you.'

'I don't believe in politicians either, any more than I understand someone who runs after power. At heart, I am an anarchist, like Kati. Lord Acton, the first anarchist, declared that "power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely".'

'Do you know what else I believe in, Leonora? In myself, and in the loyalty of my two cats and my dog.'

'What is your dog called?'

'Drusille.'

'How strange, that's the name of a woman in one of my stories!'

'That's why I called her that. Would you have been the same, had you remained at home in England?'

'No, I would have become more of a Celt, more Irish. Perhaps I would have lived in Westmeath. But, if I've got this right, Mexico made me who I am because had I remained in either England or Ireland, I would not have experienced the yearning for the world of

my childhood as I did here … What I paint is my nostalgia.'

'The weight of your forebears.'

'I never read Mary Edgeworth, but I think that instead of having hair on my head, the green pastures of Ireland grew there.'

Pepita takes her to La Lechuza — the Barn Owl — on the Avenida Miguel de Quevedo.

'Now we're going to eat real *tacos.*'

Leonora sits herself down on a low stool near a blazing open wood stove.

'Do you see, sitting at that table is Rubén Bonifaz Nuño, who translated Homer and Ovid. One of his greatest books is *De otro modo lo mismo,* or *Whichever Way is the Same*. Doesn't that seem a good title to you? Do you prefer *tacos* filled with chicken livers or mushrooms?'

'Mushrooms have a soul,' Leonora replies, as she attempts to use the cutlery.

'Wait here for me, Leonora, I am going to greet the poet.'

'Do you know him?'

'No.'

Pepita gets to Rubén at the same moment he is putting a steak *taco* dripping red sauce into his mouth. A moment later, he is bowing to Leonora:

'At your feet, Señora.'

Pepita distracts Leonora by saying: 'Not all of us can be geniuses like you and Rubén, that much I know.'

She leads her along the Paseo de la Reforma, and Leonora discovers that the little figures she used to model in the dark of her cave have grown into giants. A doctor, Isaac Masri, has put them along the length of the track that she used to ride down long ago, at least until she grew bored of doing so. Now she sees how the public seats itself at the Cannibal Table, and how children are trying to clamber inside her House of the Spirits. She enjoys seeing her crocodile taking the sun out of doors, and The Stove of Simon Magus the Sorcerer now measuring over three metres high. Her sculptures are enjoying the sun, the Montezuma cypresses and the motorists, who wind down their car windows to admire them from afar.

'Today I am going to take you to a giant aquarium that has just opened in the south of the capital.'

'And what kind of a thing is that? Is it very far?'

'Yes, but if it gets late, then we can stay and eat down there.'

'Like where?'

'In any of the cheap restaurants there. Guess what, people are saying that I look like you. I know I'm not really that pretty, but what do you think?'

'Well, to start with, you're a fair bit taller,' says Leonora with a

smile. ‘I’ve grown smaller, for old age makes you shrink, to fit all the better into your coffin. I lived several lives: that of my childhood, my rebellions, as a mother, then as an artist.’

‘I have lived more than you,’ says Pepita presumptuously. ‘No-one has ever spared hurting or humiliating me. Whatever happened to make you suffer?’

Was there ever a more painful source of pain than the loss of Max, or the experience of her imprisonment? For his part Chiki, the father of her children, lives as if the world were an enormous orphanage filled with numbers. Leonora abandoned him along the way, just as he, too, gave up on himself. In contrast, she is alive, nothing of her has vanished: not her painting, nor her rebelliousness, nor the arrogance of her independence, nor her English good manners, nor her opinions of others, nor her visions. The one thing she still knows nothing about is her own death.

‘At my age, what begins to worry me is how to comprehend what comes after death.’

‘Do you really think that there’s anything to come? Just as we need to reconcile ourselves to life, so we need to reconcile ourselves to the idea of death.’

‘How can anyone reconcile themselves to the unknown? We don’t know anything at all about death, despite the fact that we all have to die, whether we are animal, vegetable, or mineral. EVERYTHING DIES,’ Leonora shouts. ‘How can you possibly make your peace with something of which you know nothing? To stare death in the face? I would not like to die in any case, but if I should may it be when I attain five hundred years, and via a slow process of evaporation.’

‘Don’t get worked up, lighten up, it was just a question! It’s entirely likely that I’ll die before you.’

What is it like? questions Leonora. *What is death? Death! Life! I came to Earth to find out what it is all about and I still don’t know.*

One thing she is sure of, her freedom is a victory, and because of it, she lives alone. Throughout her life, divesting herself of God, of convention, of Max, Renato, Chiki, Edward and Álvaro has been hard on her. She is still obsessed with certain ideas, even as her body fails with the years. Some nights, Max appears at her bedside either at her head or her feet, at her breast or before her eyes. Above all, she feels him in her hands when she washes her hair. She recalls the enormity of her harshness when she told him: ‘I can’t come out with you today, I have to stay in and wash my hair.’

‘Is Max the person you have most loved in your whole life?’

‘I don’t know. Every love is distinct in its own way.’

‘Here we are, we’ve arrived! I’ve just got to park the car.’

Suddenly, Leonora finds herself in front of some dolphins who

emerge from the water and cross the sky in front of a crowd of magnetised spectators. They zigzag across the tank like arrows. They are coming towards her. They leap up against the blue skies and, for a few seconds, the sun is reflected on their backs, magnifying its rays, and splashing over her like the dolphins when they land back in the water, only to surface once more, smiling with their ducks' bills. Leonora returns their smile. They render her homage: how brave you have been, Leonora, how great were your battles. The dolphins take one leap after another and another at the speed of sunlight. Their diminutive fins are like wings.

Pepita, smiling from ear to ear, assures her that the dolphins are speaking to her, and to anyone who knows how to understand them:

'Yes, I know how to listen to animals, it's a gift I've had since I was a little girl,' she replies.

The dolphins nod their agreement, as if replying to an examiner. Then they play hide-and-seek. Enchanted, Leonora extends her hand towards one of their silvery backs.

'Loneliness is what kills them,' Pepita tells her.

'So they are like me,' Leonora repeats, as if to convince herself. 'Solitude kills them.'

She remembers Black Bess, her pony, and Winkie, her mare, and sees Tanguito, the bull she could do nothing for, before her eyes, and the bleating of the sheep at Ávila station. Winkie neighs. She is the mare of the night, the lover of the wind. The dolphins dance for her and whistle a sound that goes through her guts, that of the giantess condemned to paint for the rest of her life, the giantess who accepts that loneliness kills and is ready to die at her easel, for creation can only take place in solitude, for one has to be as submerged as a dolphin in order to create. A wild horse with a long mane appears on the crest of the water, then another appears, reflected in the dolphins' eyes. Are the dolphins really horses? Leonora talks to them in a low voice, telling them all about Crookhey Hall and the *sidhes*; of Max and his flight from St. Martin d'Ardèche; the horrors of the electro-convulsive treatments in Santander; Maurie's death, Nanny's, Remedios', José Horna's; and they console her with their little glassy half-closed eyes, which are not those of Gerard, nor Ernst, nor Luis Morales, but are urging her to come out and play.

Leonora caresses its slippery back one last time. The dolphin lifts his head to tell her how she resembles Alice and the White Goddess; the Minotaur's daughter and the Great Bear; then Penelope, Dulcinea, Beatrice, and the love which moves the heavens and the stars.

'I am hungry, Leonora, let's go and eat what Yolanda has prepared in your kitchen. Call her when we get home and, when she comes in, we'll throw ourselves upon her, tear her face off and I'll

wear it to the party tonight.'

'Only if you promise me that you'll kill her before you tear off her face, otherwise you will cause her too much pain.'

'I want us to leave here right now,' Pepita orders.

'You are as pale as a marble statue.' Leonora sounds worried.

All of a sudden feathers sprout from the body of the young woman. They grow over her shoulders, her neck, her eyebrows, eyelashes, on her arms and hands. Instead of hair, Leonora watches as a crown of white plumes arises from her forehead, shining like snow beneath the Mexican sun. Her ears move as a horse's do. Pepita gets up from her chair, and a splendiferous tail sweeps the floor.

'Get up, Leonora, hurry!' her hooves are pounding.

'Are we in the Bois de Boulogne, Pepita?'

'Of course we're not! We are on the lower slopes of the Ajusco, it is cold, cold with ice sliding down from the mountain, the horses are made of ice, and look at the trees covered in snow. At your side stand two great black horses, yoked together.'

'I can't see any of this.'

'That's because you yourself are a small white horse that has just tumbled over and is dying.'

'Am I about to die?'

'You live the death of the animals, for you are like them.'

'So I am not about to die?'

'Of course not! Remember the phrase you kept repeating to yourself when they took Max away: "I am not fated to die." You are about to enter a dark country from where you will emerge transfigured.'

'Tell me what to do in order to emerge!' says Leonora suspiciously.

'Be keen to get to the other side, like Caer, daughter of the lord of Connacht, who metamorphosed into a swan. So hurry up now, give me your arm, I'm in a hurry, Leonora, I'm in a very great hurry.'

'If this is a holiday, what do you have to do?'

'Paint a giantess.'

Acknowledgements

IN AMONG LEONORA CARRINGTON'S STORIES, *Little Francis* and *The Stone Door*, together with *Memories from Below*, one encounters three of the most important events in the artist's life. Once more in *House of Fear, A Flannel Night Shirt, The Oval Woman, The Hearing Trumpet* and *The Seventh Horse*, Leonora appears entirely recognisable. In them it is possible to recognise the resemblances to *Max and Leonora* by Julotte Roche, herself a resident of St. Martin d'Ardèche and who interviewed the Ardechois villagers who had once lived alongside the two artists.

I started out to write a novel inspired by Leonora Carrington, but rather than compose a story that merely alluded to her, I decided to write directly about her and extend the homage started by Lourdes Andrade, a major scholar of Mexican Surrealism, who died on Thursday 26th October 2002, when she was run over by a drunken motorist in Chipalcingo, Guerrero. That day, the scholar was on her way to the launch of her book *The Legends of the Wind's Lover*, on the subject of Carrington's literary output. Lourdes was in the habit of walking in the Colonia Roma with Leonora and I set out to retrace that route by way of a tribute to the two of them.

Ever since the 1950s, extended over a long period of time, I visited and interviewed Leonora. She invited me over to dine on *mole* as black as the Lancashire coal mines, and Chiki and their two sons, Gaby and Pablo — still young children — kept us company. I also conducted several interviews with Kati Horna, for whom I maintain an immense respect, and with her daughter Norah. There followed the beautiful Alice Rahon, Gilberto Bosques, Gunther Gerzso, Fernando Gamboa, Malú Cabrera and Harry Block; Mathias Goeritz, Jesús Reyes Ferreira, Juan Soriano, Manuel Álvarez Bravo and Juan O'Gorman, together with Raoul and Carito Fournier; Inés Amor, Antonio Souza and Alejandro Jodoroswky; and then Renato Leduc and his daughter Patricia, who entrusted me with a letter from Leonora to her father, along with two previously unpublished photographs.

During the visits I paid Leonora over the last few years, I would try not to bother her with direct questions. She always began our conversations by asking, 'Tell me what's new in politics', or else with a 'How do you like the President?' but I more often responded by telling her about my own childhood, the piano and the ballet lessons, or in good manners, relating anecdotes which prompted her recall of even

the name of her French governess, Mlle. Varenne, or of her piano teacher, Mr. Richardson. Then she would say: 'Tell me about your love life.' She had no desire to discuss her own, and when I asked her whether Max Ernst had been the love of her life, she answered: 'Every love is different, let's not get too personal.' The personal matter of which she did speak, with horror, throughout one entire afternoon was of her confinement in Santander and of the treatment she received there: 'They've made Cardiazol illegal and I had three doses of it.'

I assured her I had arrived at the Calle Chihuahua on horseback, or else on the back of a goose or a dragon, and the idea used to entertain her. On occasion, I would tell her how an owl man or a comet's tail had guided me to Insurgentes, the widest avenue in the city, to which she responded: 'So, let's go and see your comet's tail,' and we used to go out on to the street where we could watch a river of car headlamps passing by. Her magic transformed them into alchemical symbols and, through the car windows, strange figures emerged riding on kites.

Seeing Leonora has always been a privilege and a pleasure, for it takes me back to my own childhood, my parents, my origins, to the countries we had in common. She is a bewitching woman. They call her white, black or red, but what's undoubtedly the case is that Leonora makes magic with every colour there is and that she is the most beautiful enchantress to have survived into our lifetimes. Three times over, she was sent to the inquisitors' pyres in England, France and Spain. Yet every time she emerged purified by fire, until she became a slender rod of precious metal. She is the painter who most resembles her brushes. There are even those who say she is an artist who paints with her eyelashes.

Visit her house and you will always find a fiesta. I deem myself lucky to be near a human being and an artist who makes me want to inhabit a world I had some inkling of in my childhood, well before I lost my way on the track of becoming a journalist.

Only recently, Leonora and I went out to eat at Sanborn's; Café Tacuba; Casa Lamm; and in Chimalistac. A while ago we ate at Isaac Masri's house, and Leonora made Joy Laville, Carlos Monsiváis and me laugh by telling us we all have a tiny President Salinas de Gortari inside each one of us.

Monsiváis and I accompany her to numerous events in her honour at UNAM, the Sala Manuel M. Ponce de Bellas Artes, the Palacio de Minería, the José Luis Cuevas Museum, the Convent of Sor Juana and even to Los Pinos, where she received the National Art Prize.

Leonora illustrated my book, *Lilus Kikus,* and when I tried to return the original pictures to her, she smiled and told me: 'You may

keep them.' They are now framed and hanging in Mérida, in the house of my daughter Paula. On another occasion, a couple of years ago, Leonora provided me with preliminary drawings both by herself and her son, Pablo, for *Rondas de la Niña Mala*. I think that the very last sketch she made was in fact for this same book, since she no longer paints, or even draws.

We always conversed in either English or French, which is why I decided not to translate her expressions literally in the original Spanish version of this book. I call it a novel, for it has no pretensions whatsoever to being a biography, but is instead a free approximation to the life of an exceptional artist.

As to the books I have most of all had recourse to, *Villa Air-Bel, World War II, Escape* and *A House in Marseille*, written with mastery and an open heart by Rosemary Sullivan, has shown itself indispensable for the manner in which it recounts the death of Walter Benjamin, or explains how Varian Fry of the American Rescue Committee saved the life of so many others, now that nobody any longer remembers his name.

On the other hand, books produced by North American writers Whitney Chadwick and Susan L. Aberth provide invaluable information, not to mention the analyses afforded by Marina Warner. I admired the interview with Paul de Angelis and, above all, the writing by Salomon Grimberg.

In like manner, the interviews graciously extended me by Leonora herself, Gaby and Pablo Weisz, Rosita and Max Shein, Ana Alexandra Gruen, brother and sister Miguel and Helen Escobedo, Pedro Friedeberg and Joanna Moorhead have all, in one way or another, proved indispensable.

I wish also to express my gratitude to my editor and close friend Braulio Peralta, and to Gabriel Sandoval for their encouragement and their faith in this book, which could not possibly have reached completion without Mayra Pérez Sandi Cuen, who never let up in pursuing her fervent and tireless reading of one chapter after another; and to Rubén Ángel Henríquez Serrano for his splendid suggestions and the care with which he checked the book line by line; and to Yolanda Gudino for her discretion, loyalty and love for Leonora, and to the Benjamin Franklin Library, who lent me material from their special collections.

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It opens one's eyes to read whatever the critic and scholar Tere Arcq has written. The outstanding interview with Elena Urrutia on the subject of Leonora's doll-making opened a new door on the full set of this painter's skills. Daniel Centeno, in El Paso, Texas, made himself responsible for calling in books impossible to find in Mexico.

In addition to all this, the names of the talented writer Alain Paul Maillard; the art critic Luís Carlos Emerich, also curator of the vast exhibition mounted at MARCO in 1994; Juan Antonio Ascensio, who loaned me a Dictionary of Surrealism and a disk on which I could hear the voices of André Breton and Angelica Abellyra, and his articles in *La Jornada* are all names that come easily to mind.

I am also grateful to Isabel Castillo González; to my indispensable Chabe, who fifteen years ago knitted me the red sweater which protects me from the cold when I am at work in my little study; to Martina García Ramírez, whose strength and intelligence work hard to protect both humans and animals; to Paula Haro, my daughter, who read the early chapters and sharply proposed a number of corrections; and to Mane and Felipe, for picking me up each time I was starting to go under.

Birds regularly arrived at my study window just as dusk fell, and their racket made me think that if Pisanello had already painted every single one of them, Leonora hatched them all over again, in order to bestow on them the face of a *zenzontle* bird, or of a canary, or a hen, and so create a new reality for them. Horus' own sparrowhawk flies through her paintings dressed as a Harlequin, while Ur Jar traverses the skies in a hot air balloon; in *Are You Really Syrious?* the hanging star interrogates us and plays with the meanings of language; the *sidhes* and the Tuatha Dé Danann, are spherical and intangible, the Celtic and druidic White Goddess, lunar and so before all time, revolves — as she does in *Samain* and *Pastoral* — in order to render visible the invisible past, and instruct us in the vast zoology we all contain within ourselves.